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the weekly

# Standard

FEBRUARY 13, 2017

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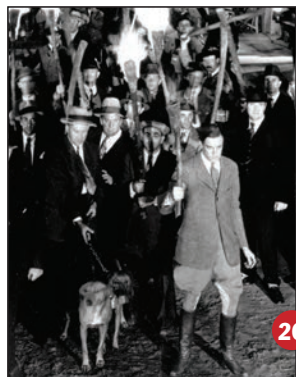
## THE REVOLT AGAINST THE ELITES



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# The Bess Is Yet to Come

The Ahabs at the *Washington Post* continue their obsessive pursuit of the Great Orange Whale. And if that means harpooning the inoffensive spouse of their prey, so be it. Witness an extended *Post* article last week, “The AWOL first lady,” which takes Melania Trump to task for being “barely visible.” The first lady hasn’t done any public appearances since the inaugural festivities, nor has she made herself available to the press, tut-tutted the *Post*, going on to note, disapprovingly, that Mrs. Trump “has not indicated with any specificity what she has planned for her new role.”

As if that weren’t indictment enough, the *Post* sputtered on, “The first lady’s quiet first week” is “raising questions about her willingness to shape her public image.” (Clearly a violation of Article VIII of the Constitution, which enumerates the powers and responsibilities of the president’s significant other.) Worse still, “Melania Trump appears to be in no hurry to heed the call of duty.” Downright dereliction!

THE SCRAPBOOK may be forgiven, we hope, for failing to get all worked up. The fact that Mrs. Trump has chosen to reside with her 10-year-old son at their home in New York until the end

of the school year strikes us as perfectly reasonable. And what appears to be her general indifference to the folderol of official Washington suggests Melania is sensible and then some.

The president’s wife may tradition-



Truman and Trump: Separated at birth?

ally be the White House “hostess,” but at the moment, Donald Trump seems to have things on his mind other than entertaining. Perhaps in time that will change and no doubt Mrs. Trump will get around to appointing the regular FLOTUS flotsam—social secretaries, directors of communications, and various deputy directors of policies and projects and whatnot. But

what if she doesn’t? We’ve had bachelor presidents, widowed presidents, and presidents whose wives avoided Washington whenever possible. The nation endured.

Indeed, the whole notion of a ceremonial, even bureaucratic, first lady is a relatively modern phenomenon: The term didn’t exist until the middle of the 19th century. Come the 20th, Eleanor Roosevelt may have shown what could be done by an ambitious presidential spouse. But her successor set a different example entirely: Bess Truman hated the circus so much that she spent a good part of her husband’s presidency at her mother’s house in Missouri.

Now, of course, a whole wing of the executive mansion is devoted to the Office of the First Lady, where a staff of some two dozen consumes taxpayer funds to project a political image of public engagement, domestic bliss, and high fashion sense. Anything that our Slovenian-born first lady does to dial down the imperial pomp is a service to American democracy. And THE SCRAPBOOK can’t help but admire—in this time of bullhorns and boisterous blowhards—someone who doesn’t feel the need to insert herself unnecessarily into the national tantrum. ♦

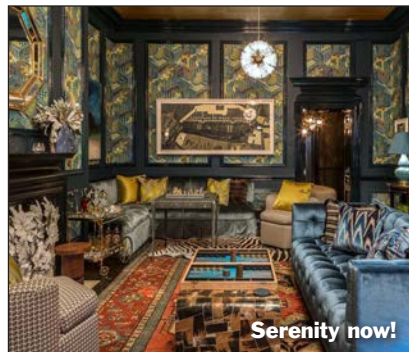
TRUMAN, AP; TRUMP, NEWSCOM

## Needs Some Plaid

The *Wall Street Journal* last week ran a piece on an interior design trend not for the faint of heart—maximalism: “The Lush New Décor Look That’s Vanquishing Minimalism.”

Indeed, the controlled crazy that is maximalism, a layered décor style packed with delightfully disparate elements, is taking hold. Chinoiserie, tassels and zebra prints share space. Ornate inherited furniture is rehabilitated. . . . The look is luxe, manic—even a bit Auntie Mame.

The *Journal* offers some visual examples. One photo shows “a richly



rowdy family game room,” with a supernova sort of chandelier hanging over an azure velour couch full-up with fat, fringed throw pillows. There’s the obligatory zebra pelt on top of a busy Persian rug, another sofa (this one gray-green velvet), two chairs modeled on Bear Bryant’s fedora, and, all the way around, a veriginous peacock, black, and gold wallpaper that could have been designed by Escher. The riot of peripheral gewgaws includes a steam-punk cocktail cart crowded with pitcher, shaker, and gold-rimmed glasses.

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Maximalism has, of course, been around for decades in art, music, and literature. But it is a rebellion that “suits our era,” the *Journal* concludes, suggesting that’s because of the environment it creates: “somewhere soft and protective” to shelter people from uncertainty about “the economy, the climate, the future.” Perhaps—if one’s idea of a soft and protective environment is a room decorated by a color-blind Victorian on acid.

No, there’s something else going on, something indeed expressive of the times. Mr. Cool has left the Oval Office. His calm, unruffled demeanor was captured in the serenity of the Farnsworth House. But he couldn’t be president forever (much to the Democrats’ dismay), which means this is no time for Miesian austerity.

So how about instead an embrace of the new president’s design sensibility (which can be described as something between that of Louis XIV and a Camorra don)? Never! The stylish set would no more be caught celebrating Donald Trump than they would be seen wearing the Full Cleveland. Unless, that is, either were being done as haute kitsch—and about the only thing that could make the new maximalist style kitschier would be the addition of a black-lighted velvet Elvis.

There are other reasons to see maximalism as a perfect expression of the times: It goes to 11. Whether it’s Twitter, television, or the National Mall, we’re in a dizzying fun-house. Everywhere is a cry for attention, the outraged competing with the enraged competing with the deranged (and that’s just the editorial board of the *New York Times*).

Come to think of it, the new whirligig style of decorating may be, if not “soft,” at least “protective” after all—a fashion loud enough to drown out our noisy and noisome politics. ♦

## Northern Exposure

Those looking to study Korean in its native land suffer from no dearth of options: Seoul is chock-full



of fine universities offering to teach the notoriously difficult tongue to foreigners. But for those seeking an experience a little more, well, what’s the word—Stalinist?—there is Tongil Tours. And have they got a deal for you: This summer, you can study Korean at Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang.

Now that just about everybody and their mother has gone to Cuba, this will no doubt appeal to a certain kind of, shall we say, adventurer. (Or shall we say *ghouls*, as that better describes those who like to visit totalitarian theme-parks?) And Kim Il-sung U is the place to study in North Korea. As Tongil Tours says on its website,

“Kim Il Sung University is the most well-known university in the DPRK.” Indeed, notable alumni include Kim Jong-il, whose stellar leadership of that country succeeded in starving millions. (But don’t blame the university for that. Given that he was Kim Il-sung’s son, he probably got in as a legacy.)

The cost of the course works out to a thousand euros a week, rivaling American university summer-program prices in a country where \$50 a month are plum wages. But you should budget for a bit more: Given the North Korean regime’s propensity for snatching foreigners and holding them for ransom, THE SCRAPBOOK





Kim Il-sung University

suggests students bring a little extra pocket money.

While boasting that the university offers an “excellent Korean language program,” Tongil’s website includes an oblique sort of warning: When enrolled at KIS U, “Outside of sensitive political themes, you can chat about anything and really build friendships.”

*Outside of sensitive political themes*—so if you’re dragged off to a work camp, don’t say you weren’t warned. Then again, it’s not as though students aren’t practiced in the skills they’ll need: Staying out of ideological trouble at Kim Il-sung University probably requires no more caution than that recommended at most American universities these days. ♦

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## the weekly Standard

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# I've Got Mail

**J**L. Penfold died early on the morning of January 10. He was 71 years old. He was at home. And he was surrounded by his family. All of which are blessings.

I met J.L. about a dozen years ago. A regular reader of *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*, he had come on one of the magazine's first cruises. I can't quite remember where we first bumped into one another, but I suspect it was in the ship's cigar lounge. We started talking politics and before we knew it several hours had passed. Although we were at different points on the ride—I was newly married; he was nearing retirement—we took to one another immediately.

A week or so after the cruise, an email from J.L. popped up in my inbox. I replied, and we picked up where we'd left off. Our correspondence went on like that, every few days, until he entered hospice care a few weeks ago.

Over the years, I learned about his childhood and his family: A resident of Greeley, J.L. came from a family that has been in Colorado for five generations. He and his wife, Marian, have three grown children, all of whom live close by and gave him a great amount of pleasure. His daughter is a lawyer and one of his sons is, like me, a devotee of Batman.

J.L. sent me joyous notes whenever one of his grandbabies was born and after each of my children came into the world. Three years ago, when my uncle was dying of cancer, I asked J.L. to pray for him. He did.

J.L. was a Methodist minister, which was a perfect fit. He was kind and smart and genuinely humble. I'm not sure if Methodists believe in the communion of saints, but

J.L. was definitely the saintly type.

While Christ reigned supreme in his life, his earthly interests ranged far and wide. He was exceptionally well read and, from time to time, he'd send me a book from his library that he thought I'd find useful. Yet of all the tidbits we shared over the years, my favorite was a photograph of J.L. with his father, son, and



grandson. Seeing four generations of Penfold men together made me indescribably happy.

He and my eldest daughter share a birthday, and every year, without fail, he would email to wish her a happy day. I suspect I will never celebrate one of her birthdays without thinking of him.

I have a few other close correspondents. Back in 2001, a fellow in Wisconsin emailed me to complain about a headline I'd written. We became such bosom friends that when I came to the state to cover Barack Obama in 2008, I wound up snowed in at his house having pizza with him, his wife, and their kids. Another friend lives in Malibu. He and I wrote back and forth for 14 years before

finally meeting in person. He's one of the wisest men I know, and I often go to him for advice.

Sometimes my correspondents and I gab about politics, but just as often we don't. There is a retired lady in New Hampshire who writes to me at least once a week. We mostly chat about tennis.

All told, I have maybe a dozen of these pen pals, though that term doesn't really do them justice. I treasure these relationships because they are so unexpected. One of the pleasures of the writer's life is the chance to strike up friendships with other writers you admire. When I started my career, it never occurred to me that there were friendships to be found among readers, too.

The term "reader mail" carries a slightly zany connotation. Back when people used to send paper letters, you could always tell the cranks ahead of time because their envelopes would be covered in scribbles, stamps, or stickers. Or all of the above—as if they finished their letters, sealed them up, and then couldn't stop themselves from telling you one more thing.

The era of email reduced real mail to a trickle, but increased the overall volume of correspondence—and the percentage of crazy. I'd guess that around 10 percent of the emails I get are unhinged, moronic, or abusive, though many of the people writing are not actually bonkers. It's just that they never expect a human being to read their missives. Most of them seem more chagrined than triumphant when I reply.

And I almost always reply. Because you never know.

It is a blessing that my life intertwined with J.L.'s as it did. I'm grateful for his friendship. But I miss his voice all the same.

**JONATHAN V. LAST**

# Make 50 the New 60

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer isn't a happy warrior. He loves the spotlight, but everyone's paying more attention to his colleagues Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. He hoped to be majority leader, but Republicans surprised most observers by holding the Senate on Election Day. He fulminated throughout 2016 against the decision by Republicans to deny President Barack Obama Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland a hearing, let alone a vote, but his GOP counterpart, Mitch McConnell, showed how it's done by succeeding in holding his caucus together behind that strategy.

So on January 3 of this year Schumer talked tough. "We are not going to settle on a Supreme Court nominee," he told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow. "If they don't appoint someone who's really good, we're going to oppose him tooth and nail."

As Schumer made clear moments later, the only nominee to fill the late Justice Antonin Scalia's seat whom Democrats would consider "really good" would be a nominee who doesn't share the judicial philosophy of Antonin Scalia. And when the MSNBC host suggested that "no [Trump] nominee would be legitimate" because the appointment was rightfully Obama's, Schumer agreed. "It's hard for me to imagine a nominee that Donald Trump would choose that would get Republican support that we could support. So you're right." Asked if he would do his best to keep the Scalia seat open indefinitely, Schumer replied: "Absolutely."

So Chuck Schumer is pretty well committed to trying to marshal his members to an effort that's never succeeded. Over the years many Supreme Court nominees have failed to make it out of the Senate (with or without an up-or-down vote being held). The Senate minority party has used the filibuster to kill countless pieces of legislation. But the Senate minority has never used the filibuster to defeat a qualified and ethical Supreme Court nominee.

Chuck Schumer is a smart and savvy politician. He surely knows that if 41 Democrats band together to deny an up-or-down vote on the confirmation of a nominee as well-respected as Judge Neil Gorsuch, Republicans will most likely eliminate the 60-vote hurdle on Supreme Court nominees—just as Democrats did in 2013 for all other judicial and executive branch nominees. If Democrats want to preserve the possibility of filibustering Supreme Court nominees, they could have a better chance of success in the future against a weaker nominee, supported perhaps by a slimmer GOP Sen-

ate majority and an administration nearer the end of its term.

But Democrats may very well blow up their chance of filibustering a future nominee. Democrats are still smarting over the Senate Republican majority's decision to hold Scalia's seat open for the winner of the 2016 presidential election. Liberal activists want payback and are threatening to primary any Democrat who votes to allow an up-or-down vote on Gorsuch's nomination—even if he or she then votes against Gorsuch.

We trust that if Democrats choose to filibuster, Republicans will be smart enough and tough enough to confirm Gorsuch with a simple majority vote. But all Chuck Schumer needs to turn an expected defeat into a shocking victory is to recruit three supporters among the 52 Senate Republicans. To that

end, Schumer has suggested that the Republicans who would let 41 Democrats block Trump's nominee are the "Republicans who believe in the institution of the Senate."

This is nonsense: Any Republican who would let 41 Democrats keep the Scalia seat empty would not be protecting the institution of the Senate. He would simply be embracing the principle that liberal activists appointed by Democrats need 51 votes for confirmation but constitutionalists appointed by Republicans need 60 votes. For if Democrats had won the White House and the Senate in 2016, there was zero doubt that they would have steamrolled any GOP Supreme Court filibuster. There is zero doubt they will do it in the future even if Republicans forbear. We know this because it's what Harry Reid told us Democrats would do. "They mess with the Supreme Court, [the filibuster will] be changed just like that," Reid said, snapping his fingers, according to a report published at *Talking Points Memo* in October when a Hillary Clinton victory and a Hillary Clinton nominee seemed likely.

There is no reason to believe, if Republican senators agree to requiring 60 votes for this Supreme Court nominee, that Democrats would reciprocate when the tables are turned. An instructive lesson is how the filibuster for lower-court nominees was eliminated. After Democrats engaged in an unprecedented level of obstruction of George W. Bush's judicial nominees, Republicans considered curtailing the filibuster. But in 2005 a bipartisan "Gang of 14" struck a deal to keep it. Just eight years later, Democrats eliminated it and proceeded to stack the second-most important court in the country, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, with their favorites.



*Unhappy Schumer*



As the fight to confirm Gorsuch proceeds, Republicans and other defenders of the Constitution will be entirely correct to argue that a filibuster of Gorsuch would be unprecedented. Republicans will also be correct to point out the ways in which Democratic treatment of Gorsuch differs from the GOP majority's refusal to consider Obama nominee Merrick Garland during a presidential election year. (Chuck Schumer and Joe Biden both said during previous Republican administrations that Supreme Court nominees should not be confirmed during a presidential election campaign.)

Republican senators have taken an oath to support and defend the Constitution, and they have an obligation to confirm Supreme Court justices who would do the same. If they fail to exercise their constitutional authority to confirm Gorsuch out of deference to a Senate rule that has never been used to block a qualified Supreme Court nominee—a rule that we know Democrats would eliminate if the tables were turned—they will make Chuck Schumer happier. But they will have failed the country and the Constitution.

—William Kristol

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# A Great Scalia Successor

In nominating federal appeals court judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, President Trump has made an excellent choice. Assuming there is nothing in Gorsuch's record that is disqualifying, the Senate should confirm him posthaste.

The path to the Gorsuch nomination began almost a year ago when a seat opened on the Court as a result of Justice Antonin Scalia's death. The conventional wisdom at the time was that President Obama would nominate a jurist whom the Senate then would confirm. But Majority Leader Mitch McConnell saw the matter differently. Yes, under the Constitution the president has the exclusive power to nominate justices. But the Senate also has a power that it alone may exercise—that of consenting (or not) to a president's nomination. Without that consent no nominee may be appointed to the Court.

Within hours of Scalia's death McConnell announced that the Senate would not hold hearings or votes on whom-ever President Obama might nominate in the balance of what was, of course, an election year. In other words, there would be no confirmation process for any nominee. Relying on Senate precedent, McConnell's position—shared by other Republicans in their majority of 54—was that the next president, whoever that might be, Republican or Democratic, should fill the vacancy. Which meant, of course, that

voters would have the chance to pick the person who would nominate the next justice.

In retrospect what is striking is not only that the Republican majority held its no-consent position against Obama's eventual nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, and thus kept open Scalia's seat for the next president to fill, but also that Trump, not known for his constitutionalist interests, took seriously the possibility that he would be the one nominating Scalia's successor.

Trump prepared for such a moment by consulting with conservative lawyers and scholars who specialize in judicial selection and devising a list of 21 prospects for the Court, whom he held out as judicial conservatives all. Trump said he would pick the next justice and any others from this list. He ran on that list, in effect, by distinguishing between the kind of judge he would pick and the kind Hillary Clinton would choose. Trump said his kind would "interpret the Constitution the way the Founders wanted it interpreted." Clinton said her kind would advance liberal causes such as abortion rights.

Trump's position on judicial selection benefited him on Election Day. In exit polling, one of every five voters said that Supreme Court appointments were the most important factor for them in voting for president. And of those voters, 57 percent favored Trump and 40 percent supported Clinton.

By the usual measures, Gorsuch is an outstanding choice. He has impressive degrees—a B.A. from Columbia, a J.D. from Harvard, and a doctor of philosophy from Oxford. After clerking for Justices Byron White and Anthony Kennedy, Gorsuch became a highly regarded litigator at Kellogg Huber, one of Washington's elite law firms. He left private practice to serve as a high-level official in the Justice Department, before President George W. Bush appointed him to the Tenth Circuit, which hears cases from eight western states. His estimable record as a judge includes compelling opinions on, among other topics, religious liberty and criminal law and procedure. He is widely praised for his character and judicial temperament. At only 49, he could have a long tenure on the Court.

Most notable about Gorsuch is, of course, his Scalia-like judicial philosophy. Throughout his campaign Trump evinced his admiration for Justice Scalia and his approach to interpreting the law. Indeed, it was a constant talking point for Trump that he wanted to nominate someone jurisprudentially like Scalia. He has done that in choosing Gorsuch.

Like Scalia, Gorsuch is a textualist in the sense that he seeks the meaning of a statute in the actual terms of the law—and not in manipulable legislative history. Like Scalia, he is an originalist in the sense that he seeks the meaning of a constitutional provision through study of how it was understood at the time of its enactment.

Also like Scalia, Gorsuch seeks to preserve the structure created by the Constitution, as found in the separation of powers and federalism. Indeed, Gorsuch may be more open than Scalia was to challenges to the modern administrative



state, where lie perhaps the most important legal issues for the constitutional lawyers of Gorsuch's generation.

Yet another way in which the judge is like Scalia is in his writing, which is consistently excellent and often touched with humor. Consider his 2012 opinion in an otherwise dry dispute between two insurance companies:

Haunted houses may be full of ghosts, goblins, and guil-lotines, but it's their more prosaic features that pose the real danger. Tyler Hodges found that out when an evening shift working the ticket booth ended with him plummeting down an elevator shaft. But as these things go, this case no longer involves Mr. Hodges. Years ago he recovered from his injuries, received a settlement, and moved on. This lingering specter of a lawsuit concerns only two insurance companies and who must foot the bill. And at the end of it all, we find, there is no escape for either of them.

Those who follow the Supreme Court will be grateful that another fine stylist will soon be sitting among the justices.

Assuming, of course, that Gorsuch is confirmed. Democrats are in a nasty Trump-fighting mood, and Senate Democrats are talking of filibustering the nominee. Republicans, with a majority of 52, would need 60 votes to end a filibuster, a number that could be hard to reach. Four years ago Senate Democrats did away with the filibuster for lower-court nominations. Senate Republicans should now extend that rule to Supreme Court nominations, if need be. Would the judge from Colorado be worth that extraordinary effort? Indeed, he would.

—Terry Eastland

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## The Value of Life

**T**he *Telegraph* recently reported the horrifying news that a doctor in Holland had been cleared of charges after she drugged an elderly woman suffering from dementia, had her family hold her down, and killed her. The laws in Holland are such that what occurred falls under the rubric of "euthanasia." The grim practice is on the rise in Europe and elsewhere. According to a 2015 report in the *Financial Times*, about 3 percent of all Dutch deaths are now the result of euthanasia. Even more horrifying is that you no longer have to be terminally ill to be euthanized in many places. Mental illness is an increasingly common justification. In the Netherlands, a young woman in her twenties was allowed to euthanize herself based on suffering post-traumatic stress disorder from sexual abuse.

There are no doubt deep cultural explanations for the rise of euthanasia, but enthusiasm for legalization is owed in part to the imperatives of the welfare state. Canada's *National Post* last week reported on a new study that concluded eutha-

nasia could save Canada's overburdened national health care system up to \$139 million a year. "The authors go to pains to state they aren't suggesting people be voluntarily euthanized to save money," notes the *National Post*. But if they didn't want people to make a connection to cost-savings, there would be no reason to do the study.

So far only a handful of states in this country have started down the deadly path blazed by the Dutch. Most recently, voters in Colorado passed a euthanasia law last fall that is so broadly written it will surely cause a jump in "medically assisted end-of-life care," as the absurd euphemism has it. In Colorado, you need two doctors to sign off on allowing you to kill yourself. But that's not much of a restriction. A friendly dermatologist and psychiatrist would suffice to diagnose you as terminally ill and sign off on your suicide. America's opioid epidemic spread in part because of "pill mills" run by doctors who prescribed vast amounts of painkillers for profit. It's not hard to imagine "suicide mills" where, for a price, anyone can purchase a ticket to his own demise.

The good news is that Colorado may also, in a way, help inspire Americans to resist the euthanasia movement. Judge Neil M. Gorsuch, a fourth-generation Coloradan, has just been nominated to the Supreme Court and is likely to be confirmed. It's an excellent pick for many reasons, among them that Gorsuch is the author of an impressive anti-euthanasia work, *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia*. It's a wonderful book, if for no other reason than that Gorsuch, like his predecessor Antonin Scalia, is the rare judge who can write with force and wit.

The judge is a Christian (an Episcopalian who went to Catholic prep school), but he emphasizes that his case against euthanasia is grounded in "secular moral theory." He grapples with the arguments of influential thinkers on these matters, including the damnable Peter Singer, who remains a darling of the establishment despite advocating infanticide. (In 2015 Singer said, "I don't want my health insurance premiums to be higher so that infants who can experience zero quality of life can have expensive treatments.")

Though it came out a decade ago, Gorsuch's book has proved regrettably prescient, as he warned that such conditions as depression would soon become pretexts for state-sanctioned suicide. "Once we open the door to excusing or justifying the intentional taking of life as 'necessary,' we introduce the real possibility that the lives of some persons (very possibly the weakest and most vulnerable among us) may be deemed less 'valuable,' and receive less protection from the law, than others," he wrote.

Supreme Court hopefuls often keep their core beliefs to themselves, but Gorsuch writes that his book is "premised on the idea that all human beings are intrinsically valuable and the intentional taking of human life by private persons is always wrong." There's not a lot to be optimistic about these days, but the thought of a justice guided by such an important truth sitting on the High Court is a reason to hope.

—Mark Hemingway

# Angling for a Supreme Pick

How Trump landed Neil Gorsuch.

BY FRED BARNES

When Donald Trump released his first list of potential Supreme Court nominees last May, Neil Gorsuch's name was not on it. The inner circle of Trump's advisers were aware of Gorsuch's lofty reputation as a judge. Still, they kept him off the list because they hadn't fully studied his judicial record, his years as a private lawyer, and his personal life. Once they did, he impressed them, in the words of a Trump researcher, as "almost too perfect."

But the candidate's advisers—Steve Bannon, lawyer Donald McGahn, and Federalist Society executive vice president Leonard Leo—weren't ready to single him out. Instead, in September, they expanded the list from 11 to 21 candidates. And a main reason was to put Gorsuch's name on it. But by adding 10 more names, it didn't create a stir or look like favoritism.

The list, which had been Trump's idea, was soon pared to six people, five men and one woman (appeals court judge Diane Sykes). Then it shrank to four men who were personally interviewed by Trump. One of them, district court judge Amul Thapar of Kentucky, had been put on the list by Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell.

On January 14, with the list down to three, Trump interviewed Gorsuch for 45 minutes at his office in Trump Tower. It went well, but Gorsuch wasn't as dazzling as Thomas Hardiman, another appeals court judge, was in his interview. Hardiman was prepared. He came in with a binder.

Hardiman had the advantage of sitting on the Third Circuit court with

Trump's sister, Maryanne Trump Barry. She spoke highly of him. "She likes him," Trump told aides.

The final candidate interviewed by Trump was still another appeals court judge, William Pryor. He had the support of many conservatives, including Jeff Sessions, Trump's nominee for attorney general. Sessions had nice things to say about Pryor, who succeeded him as Alabama attorney general when Sessions was elected to the Senate in 1996. But he said all those on the list were worthy.

The three finalists were all the right age to serve 20 years and probably more on the Supreme Court—an important consideration. Gorsuch is 49, Hardiman 51, Pryor 54. So age didn't favor one over another. But ease of gaining Senate confirmation did. Hardiman was considered the most confirmable, Gorsuch second, Pryor third.

Pryor was viewed by Trump and his advisers as the most conservative and certainly the most outspoken, having called *Roe v. Wade* an "abomination." Gorsuch was next, Hardiman slightly less conservative. But the assessment of their conservatism was subjective. It depended in part on the cases on which they had written opinions.

It came down to Gorsuch and Hardiman. I think Gorsuch was assisted by which vacancy he would be filling. The empty seat had belonged to Justice Antonin Scalia, who died a year ago. And Trump had said during the campaign that he would appoint a Scalia-like replacement.

Gorsuch best fits the Scalia model. Like Scalia, he is a great writer, though his opinions are less biting than Scalia's. He knew Scalia and went fly fishing with him in Colorado, Gorsuch's

home state. That event has been memorialized in a now-famous picture of the two wading in a river. Also, three of Gorsuch's law clerks went on to clerk for Scalia. In short, his connection to Scalia gave Gorsuch a powerful assist.

At last week's East Room ceremony at the White House in which he introduced Gorsuch, Trump said the "image and genius" of Scalia were "in my mind throughout the decision-making process." Scalia's widow, Maureen, was in the audience. "Please stand up," he said to her. "Thank you, Maureen."

Following Trump, Gorsuch sounded like Scalia. "In our legal order it is for Congress and not the courts to write new laws," he said. "It is the role of judges to apply, not alter, the work of the people's representatives. A judge who likes every outcome he reaches is very likely a bad judge"—here he was interrupted by laughter—"stretching for results he prefers rather than those the law demands."

To repeat the numbers on the winnowing of candidates, it went from 21, to 6, 4, 3, 2, and finally 1. When



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GARY LOCKE

Trump saw Sykes's name on the list of six, he recalled the opposition of radio talk show host Charlie Sykes to him in the Wisconsin primary, which he lost. Trump thought, wrongly, that he was the judge's husband. They were married and had two children before divorcing in 1999.

Leonard Leo, who was responsible for making the selection process orderly and thorough, insists none of the final three had allies inside the selection process who lobbied for his nomination. But they did have supporters. Leo, by the way, was largely responsible for the lists. He did not advise Trump on whom to choose. He says Trump always intended to make the final list public.

Hardiman's biggest supporter was former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum. A Trump aide described Hardiman as "Santorum without the edge." Trump read Santorum's book *Blue Collar Conservatives* and agreed with its thesis that Republicans needed to appeal to neglected working-class conservatives.

Just before the Indiana primary on May 3, Trump called Santorum and asked for his endorsement. Santorum had earlier dropped out of the presidential race. He said no. After Trump locked up the GOP nomination by winning Indiana, he called Santorum again, just after Ted Cruz quit the race.

This time, Santorum had a proposition. He would endorse Trump if he released the list of those he was considering for the High Court. And he wanted his friend Hardiman's name on the list. Trump agreed. He put out the list with Hardiman on it sooner than expected and promised to pick his nominee from it. Santorum examined the list, didn't find any nonconservatives, and endorsed Trump.

They talked once more when Santorum came to Trump Tower just before Christmas. Trump told aides at the meeting that Santorum had been for Cruz. He hadn't been. Santorum urged Trump to pick Hardiman. He argued that Trump had done nothing for Pennsylvania—Hardiman lives in the Pittsburgh area—in choosing people for his new administration. But the state had delivered the presidency to Trump,

Santorum said. Trump was noncommittal. He hadn't yet met Gorsuch.

Hardiman may have a second shot at the Supreme Court. Justice Anthony Kennedy, a Reagan nominee, is rumored to be ready to retire this summer. Hardiman is already vetted and considered to be confirmable. "That will be a tougher confirmation," Leo says. "No one is off the table."

Guiding the nomination process wasn't Leo's last act. He went on a leave of absence from the Federalist Society last week to run the confirmation effort. It was ready to go, with \$10 million raised for TV ads, once Gorsuch was tapped.

In 2006, Gorsuch wrote a book

entitled *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia*. It is scholarly work and not polemical, but his opposition to euthanasia is clear. Suspecting Democrats might try to use the book against Gorsuch, a 20-page defense of the book was prepared in time for his nomination. A "memo for social conservatives" was also put together.

Rarely has such an organized campaign for a court nominee been unleashed so quickly. One of the aims of its organizers was to give Trump a process with which he would be comfortable. They gave him that. And when Gorsuch is sworn in as the ninth justice of the Supreme Court, he will no doubt be thrilled. ♦

## 'Decius' Comes in from the Cold

And goes to work in the White House.

BY MICHAEL WARREN

On a late January afternoon, as press secretary Sean Spicer walked into the White House media briefing room, a tall, thin, bespectacled man poked his head in the doorway for a moment before turning around and heading back into the West Wing. Later that week, at another briefing, the man stayed longer, standing in the corner behind the podium, out of view of the array of television cameras.

The reporters peppering Spicer with questions were unlikely to know it, but the wallflower watching over the proceedings happened to be the leading conservative intellectual to argue for the election of Donald Trump. His pseudonymous essays during the campaign sparked more discussion—and disputation—among thinkers on the right than just about anyone

else's. Rush Limbaugh spent hours on his radio show promoting what he hailed as the scribe's "shaming" of the Never Trump conservatives. Prominent conservative opponents of Trump, like *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat, *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg, and *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson, published critical responses to his most widely read essay. The writer even granted a postelection interview to the *New Yorker*, on the condition that his real identity not be revealed. The magazine described him as among those trying "to build a governing ideology" around Trump.

Now he's helping to implement that governing ideology directly. The writer is a senior national-security official in the Trump White House, nearly a decade after serving in a similar role for George W. Bush. His unmasking ends one of the remaining mysteries of last year's crazy and unpredictable election.

The enigmatic writer's real name is

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Michael Anton, and he's a fast-talking 47-year-old intellectual who, unlike most of his colleagues, can readily quote Roman histories and Renaissance thinkers. But readers knew him throughout 2016 as Publius Decius Mus, first at a now-defunct website called the *Journal of American Greatness* and later in the online pages of the *Claremont Review of Books*. As Decius, Anton insisted that electing Trump and implementing Trumpism was the best and only way to stave off American decline—making a cerebral case to make America great again.

At the center of the Anton-Decius argument (distilled best in his September essay for the *Claremont Review* entitled “The Flight 93 Election”) was the belief that the decline of the United States under the direction of the progressive left has been abetted by a bloated and lethargic conservative movement of “think-tanks, magazines, conferences, fellowships, and such” that exists to perpetuate the status quo. Conservative intellectuals had been living a contradiction, wrote Decius, decrying the decay of America's social, economic, and political traditions while offering nothing but tired ideas that tinkered on the margins of public policy—if they did anything at all. More nefariously, Decius suggested, professional conservative intellectuals were more motivated to preserve their own status (and steady stream of paychecks) than to reconsider their positions and ideological priors. His writing on this point was at once funny, clever, and vicious:

How have the last two decades worked out for you, personally? If you're a member or fellow-traveler of the Davos class, chances are: pretty well. If you're among the subspecies conservative intellectual or politician, you've accepted—perhaps not consciously, but unmistakably—your status on the roster of the Washington Generals of American politics. Your job is to show up and lose, but you are a necessary part of the show and you do get paid. To the extent that you are ever on the winning side of anything, it's as sophists who help the Davoisie

oligarchy rationalize open borders, lower wages, outsourcing, de-industrialization, trade giveaways, and endless, pointless, winless war.

For Decius, the stakes of the 2016 election were civilizational, a choice between a continuation of corrupt republicanism in the service of progressive ideals and a disruption of that arc. Violence and battle are his preferred motifs: The left is looking to “crush” dissent; a Hillary Clinton presidency would have been “Russian Roulette with a semi-auto.” The titular “Flight 93,” his heavy-handed metaphor for the election, refers to



Michael Anton emerges.

the hijacked plane on 9/11 that passengers heroically took back from terrorists. He even chose a martial nom de plume. In his *History of Rome*, Livy describes Publius Decius Mus as a Roman consul who rode to the front of his army in battle, sacrificing himself to save his men and Rome. Again, and to be clear, it's just a metaphor.

Anton/Decius viewed Trump as the only Republican willing and eager to sacrifice conservative pieties to save America. “Trump, alone among candidates for high office in this or in the last seven (at least) cycles, has stood up to say: I want to live. I want my party to live. I want my country to live. I want my people to live. I want to end the insanity,” he wrote. But it's not just the poetry Decius finds compelling about Trump—he's a fan of the prose: “The truth is that Trump articulated, if incompletely and inconsistently,

the right stances on the right issues—immigration, trade, and war—right from the beginning.” For the Trumpian intellectual, the sin of modern American politics is the unwillingness of the elites in both parties to correct “stupid immigration, economic, and foreign policies” that have created a divided people. Trumpism offers an unexplored way of “aligning the economic interests of, and (we may hope) fostering solidarity among, the working, lower middle, and middle classes of all races and ethnicities.” Liberty, prosperity, and civility—cornerstone values of mainstream conservatism—give way to solidarity, assimilation, and greatness.

Anton wasn't always where Trump is on these issues, and he has the profile of exactly the type of movement conservative for which Trumpism has no use. He was inculcated in the Straussian conservative world of the Claremont Graduate School, reading—besides the late political philosopher Leo Strauss—ancient philosophy, modern political theory, and Machiavelli. (He married his interest in the Italian Renaissance writer with his passion for men's fashion in a 2006 book called *The Suit*, a parody of *The Prince* also written under a pseudonym.)

After working as a speechwriter and press secretary for New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, he entered Bush's White House in 2001 as a communications aide for the National Security Council, a job that took on greater weight after 9/11. Anton was part of the team that made the case within the administration and to the public for invading Iraq—and he was enthusiastic about the war. That team helped craft one of the more infamous sentences in a State of the Union address, from Bush's in 2003: “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” CIA director George Tenet later said those 16 words “never should have been included” in the president's address, and the questionable intelligence behind the claim

CAROLYN KASTER / AP

became a touchstone for those who contended the case for invading Iraq was trumped up. Anton was key among those on the NSC staff who argued (eventually successfully) that the Bush administration should stop defending the statement's inclusion in the address. Decius doesn't mention the words or the arguments for the Iraq war in any of his writings, but he does state in his first essay for the *Journal of American Greatness* that the invasion "was a strategic and tactical blunder that destroyed a country (however badly governed), destabilized a region, and harmed American interests."

His evolution on the issue of Iraq is perhaps Anton's most notable shift, but it's not the only one informed by his experience as a member of the governing class he so artfully assailed as Decius. After leaving the Bush administration in 2005, Anton was a speechwriter for Rupert Murdoch at the media conglomerate News Corporation, then the director of communications at megabank Citigroup. For the last year and a half, he's been a managing director at the investment firm BlackRock. With that résumé, it's no wonder the man who referred to the "Davos class" as a "junta" and wrote that it would "be better for the nation to divide up more equitably a slightly smaller pie than to add one extra slice" chose to write under a pseudonym. Anton would no doubt happily accept that he is a "traitor to his class," which is what his *Journal of American Greatness* compatriot Julius Krein called Donald Trump in these pages. (Anton himself has contributed many pieces to THE WEEKLY STANDARD and its website, as recently as last year.)

Anton may also be a traitor to his class of conservative intellectuals, though his writings on Trump rejected by the *Claremont Review of Books* in early 2016 eventually found their home there by the end of the election. More consequential, in his new position as senior director of strategic communications at the National Security Council, he brings his brand of intellectual Trumpism right to the White House and the locus of power. The job was initially given to Monica

Crowley, the writer and television pundit, with the intention that she be a public face for the Trump White House on national-security issues. But Crowley was forced to withdraw just days before Trump was inaugurated after reports revealed she had plagiarized her last book and her Ph.D. thesis. Anton's role will likely involve less camera time and more shaping of the administration's national-security message behind the scenes.

Whatever the tasks of his White House position, Anton finds himself where many public intellectuals hope to end up: in a seat at the table

of power. In Anton's case, acquiring influence meant reconsidering his own ideological pedigree and formulating a new political ethos—one in which he was reasonably but never fully confident. In "The Flight 93 Election," Decius considered the 2016 election a game of Russian roulette for conservatives. A President Clinton would all but assure annihilation of everything they hold dear. "With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances," he wrote. Decius's spin turned out well for him—now he's at the front of the battle line, saving Rome. ♦

## Fillon Falling

Will *les Déplorables* break left or right?

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

No journalist really understood the forces that over the past year made Donald Trump president, with the possible exception of the former newspaper publisher Conrad Black. In early 2016, with the primary season barely underway, Black wrote a column in Canada's *National Post* entitled "Don't underestimate Donald. He will win." Against those who claimed Trump could not possibly break the barrier of 20, 30, or 40 percent of the vote, or that his "infelicities" doomed his candidacy, Black admitted that it certainly did appear that way. "But he seems to have become the man," Black wrote, "whom the great office of president of the United States now seeks."

Black's idea of an office "seeking" a person would sound nutty had it not been so thoroughly vindicated. The events of the past week lead one to wonder whether something similar isn't happening in France as the presidential elections scheduled for April 23 and May 7 approach. Ever

since 2011, when Marine Le Pen took over the populist National Front (FN) from her aging father, pundits have speculated that it might be possible for France to make an ideological lurch of the sort that has now taken Britain out of the European Union and brought Donald Trump to the White House.

This has always been unlikely. To simplify a bit, the FN is a coalition of two conservative out-groups: reactionary nationalists and ultramontane Catholics. Le Pen took over the party by rallying the former faction against the latter. The Catholics and their allies, though, have turned out, to the surprise of many, to be the larger force. When the unpopular Socialist government of François Hollande introduced gay marriage in 2013, millions rallied against it. Last November, the mainstream conservative party, the *Républicains*, nominated the Catholic ex-prime minister François Fillon (sounds like "peon" or "neon") as their candidate for the presidency. Le Pen's chances seemed to vanish. Fillon could start measuring the Elysée Palace for drapes.

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At the end of January, that changed. The satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* alleged that Fillon had paid his Welsh-born wife hundreds of thousands of euros for a no-show job in parliament. Hiring relatives is commonplace in French politics. Fillon admitted his wife had worked for him as a legislative aide for years, and that his children, who are lawyers, had also done legal work for him. What is anathema in French politics is a no-show job. As the *Voix du Nord* newspaper snidely put it, Mrs. Fillon was a co-worker “so discreet that she never acquired an entry badge for the Palais Bourbon, or even an email address.” She also seemed, rather mysteriously, to be collecting a large salary from the literary *Revue des deux Mondes* for similarly light duties, and Fillon’s children had done their so-called legal work when they were too young to be lawyers. Barely 10 weeks from the elections, the *Républicains* were looking for a Plan B.

“Not content to throw the bums out,” someone wrote in the daily *Le Télégramme*, “the French are now punishing candidates before they even get into office.” Marine Le Pen herself was battling a similar scandal, having been assessed a fine of over \$300,000 for listing phantom employees for her party’s delegation to the European parliament. But French voters apparently do not punish politicians for stealing from the German, Polish, and Spanish taxpayers with quite the zeal they do for stealing from French ones.

In ordinary times, the great beneficiary of Fillon’s struggles would be France’s Socialist party. But Hollande has proved, by some measures, the single least popular national leader in the Western world since World War II, with popularity ratings that have dipped into the single digits. Hollande alienated much of the country in 2012 by promising a radical anti-capitalist program that would include 75 percent taxes on top earners, and describing himself as an “enemy” of the rich. When the promised tax and other classical socialist measures turned out to be illegal, his

party’s true believers turned on him. By 2015 Hollande and his prime minister Manuel Valls, probably the most conservative figure in the Socialist party, had to pass unprecedented free-market reforms in order to keep the economy from sputtering out.

Among French Socialists there is something called “the left of the left.” That is where the votes turned out to be this primary season. For a long time, Valls appeared to be the strongest candidate to appeal to the median Frenchman, but you know the times we live in. Benoît Hamon, Hollande’s most ideological detractor among the Socialists, pulverized Valls. Hamon believes in euthanasia, green energy,



Marine Le Pen, left, and Benoît Hamon

and legalized marijuana, but at the heart of his platform is a set of unconventional economic ideas. We are undergoing a *raréfaction du travail*, he thinks—a permanent shortage of good-paying jobs. As such, he wants to abrogate Hollande’s 2015 reforms. He also favors offering each citizen a guaranteed minimum income.

Hamon has been accused of “Corbynizing” the Socialist party, as Britain’s Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn did in returning his own party to real ideological socialism. We would call this Sandersization. And if you are among those who think there is such a thing as the “change vote,” and that, by winning it, Bernie Sanders could have beaten Donald Trump, then there would be nothing silly or futile about a Hamon candidacy. Except that Hamon is not a Sanders-style nostalgic—he is a utopian. And in French politics, it’s okay to be a utopian only when it comes to experiments in sexuality—not when it

comes to the portfolios of the “caviar left,” as they are called in Paris.

The well-heeled part (and that is a big part) of the Socialist party is rushing to the exits. These voters have been smitten by Emmanuel Macron, the 39-year-old former investment banker whom Hollande appointed economy minister when bond traders were starting to worry that France was turning into a banana republic. Macron may be the most capitalistic candidate for president France has ever seen—and the present zeitgeist would seem unpropitious for introducing French Socialist voters to Clintonomics. Macron, who likes the Socialist party’s gender and ecological programs, believes a preference for clean air over dirty is enough to qualify one as a man of the left nowadays. Maybe he is right. Macron did not participate in the Socialist primary, starting instead a new political organization called *En Marche*, which humbly borrows the initials of the candidate himself. According to the weekly magazine *L’Express*, so many Socialists want to register as *En Marche* candidates that the party’s leaders fear being seen as a new label for an old politics. Pollsters have been quoted as saying that if Macron could achieve a critical mass of popularity (20 percent or so), that would suffice to convince Socialists he is their man, and *En Marche* their party.

The French “left” is laboring under a common difficulty. Like the American one, it binds together a coalition of urban elites and the disproportionately minority populations that labor for them. It is a coalition that works well as a governing majority, when it can distribute privileges, and each part of the coalition has something to gain from swallowing its misgivings and saying “yes” to all the other partners’ agendas. But once in opposition, the interests of the rich part of the party and the poor part become harder to reconcile. Look at the present disarray of American Democrats.

That is why a victory for Le Pen, while still unlikely, is now among the possible outcomes. It may not even be the strangest among them. ♦



# Mexican Americans

New guys on the block.

BY JUAN R. RANGEL & PETER SKERRY

We are two Americans with different family histories whose paths converged when we got involved with one of the nation's largest Hispanic charter school operators. At the peak of our efforts a couple of years ago, the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO) Charter School Network enrolled more than 7,600 mostly Mexican-origin students in K-12 educational programs across Chicago.

Given our longstanding preoccupation with the challenges facing Mexican Americans, we were dismayed by Donald Trump's provocative campaign rhetoric. But as political realists, we were also sobered by his words, because they highlighted the Mexican-American community's lack of influence and power.

We also recognize the basis of President Trump's popularity. For several years now, millions of Americans have felt financially squeezed and culturally marginalized by business and political elites who have refused to give any credence or legitimacy to popular anxieties aroused by a historic wave of unskilled immigrants. Determined to ignore the inevitable problems

associated with any such population movement, and often blinded by self-interest, these elites have refused to view this influx as anything other than a blessing to America's culture and a boon to the economy.



*Mexican Americans celebrate their swearing-in as U.S. citizens in Phoenix, July 4, 2007.*

We are also mindful of the provocative, often insulting, and occasionally threatening rhetoric of Mexican-American leaders seeking to make racialized claims against American society. In effect, these leaders have encouraged Hispanics not just to identify with their brown skin but also to develop *thin* skins. Not surprisingly, these same leaders have seized on Trump's rhetoric as further evidence of Mexican Americans' status as an aggrieved and victimized minority. And so, the struggle continues!

But there is an alternative view. As another immigrant, Mr. Dooley (Finley Peter Dunne's fictional Irish bartender), taught generations of Americans, "Politics ain't beanbag." Or as political scientist James Q. Wilson similarly noted, "Policymaking in the United States is . . . like a barroom brawl." To be sure, immigrants have at times been targeted by xenophobes and nativists. But just as often, they have joined the brawl as active participants in fierce economic and political competition with other immigrants, not to mention former slaves and their

descendants. This competition has seldom, if ever, been completely open and fair. But like the descendants of other immigrants, we recognize that the United States has offered greater opportunities to us and our families than were available in the lands of our forebears—whether Mexico or Ireland.

So now with Donald Trump in office, we see an opportunity for Mexican-American and Hispanic leaders generally to respond to his challenge. In the months ahead, we expect these leaders to articulate the anxieties as well as the needs of their people. We similarly anticipate their pointing to the contributions Mexican Americans have made to the nation. Less likely, though much needed, would be these leaders' encouraging their people to acknowledge the sacrifices and contributions of their fellow Americans—many of whom have their own immigrant histories.

Granted, even before Donald Trump appeared on the political stage, the context was not promising. The United States has for some time now been home to an unprecedented 11 million undocumented (or, if you will, illegal) immigrants, more than half of whom are from Mexico. Moreover, many of those arriving in recent decades have not intended to remain. Grandparents and even

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ROSS D. FRANKLIN / AP

parents continue to dream of one day returning “home.” Yet as indicated by their steadily increasing numbers, many Mexican migrants end up putting down roots here, often for the simple reason that their offspring are Americans—socially and culturally, if not always legally. Nevertheless, proximity to Mexico helps fuel continued indecision, resulting in the transiency and instability characterizing many barrio neighborhoods.

This is one reason why Mexican migrants struggle to learn English. To be sure, their efforts likely reflect less civic duty or pride than personal ambition—or the need to exert parental authority over English-speaking children. Either way, we don’t do much to help them. Meanwhile, programs such as bilingual education and bilingual ballots send quite different signals. Then, too, Mexicans typically want to hold on to some of the culture and language of their homeland. Much of this is familiar from earlier waves of immigrants in our history.

Nevertheless, in a 2013 study for the Manhattan Institute, Duke economist Jacob Vigdor reports that assimilation rates for Mexicans are substantially lower than for other immigrants today.

We are not surprised. Mexican-American leaders have long rejected the goal of assimilation, mistakenly arguing that it requires complete abandonment of their people’s heritage. The truth is, assimilation *does* involve what Norman Podhoretz called “the brutal bargain”: not only the hard work and sacrifice necessary to take advantage of opportunities, but also certain painful if not total adjustments in social and cultural values. For more than a generation, Mexican-American leaders have encouraged their people to avoid this difficult path and instead lay claim to the American dream as an oppressed racial minority whose long-standing grievances entitle them to special privileges and protections.

By contrast, we believe that the path to material success and political

power for Mexican Americans lies in understanding that theirs is only the most recent chapter in a challenging but nonetheless rewarding immigrant assimilation story, and that the best way to claim full ownership as stakeholders in America is not to cast themselves as an oppressed minority but to understand that they are—sometimes literally—the new guys on the block.

We learned this lesson working with the charter schools network. As UNO renovated or built facilities for 16 schools, we sometimes encountered opposition and hostility, especially in neighborhoods where Mexican immigrants had been displacing aging white-ethnic homeowners. But instead of accusing such neighbors of racism, denouncing them to the media, or threatening them with litigation, we opted to listen to their concerns. We looked past their sometimes annoying or even offensive complaints and acknowledged that our students and their families were newcomers. And we sought opportunities

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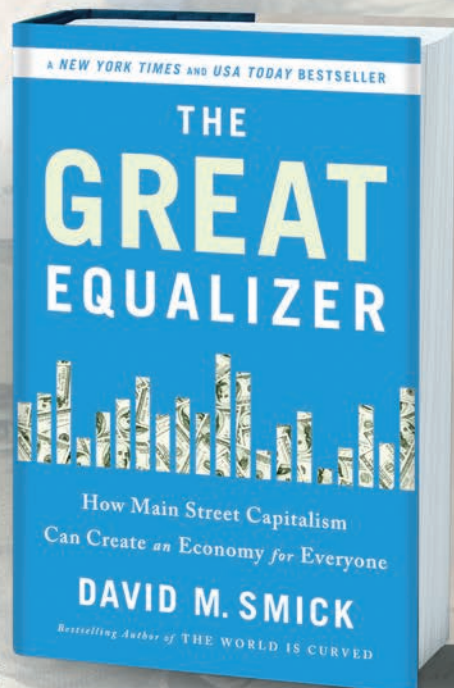
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to make the longer-term residents feel part of what we were trying to do. We expressed our shared concerns about youth gangs and sought input about what to do about them. We invited long-established neighborhood associations to hold their meetings in our buildings—and in some cases, to help us name our new schools.

Some years ago the African-American political scientist Charles Hamilton had a critical insight. In the wake of 1960s protest politics, he noted the tendency of minority leaders increasingly to seek out plaintiffs for litigation within the sedate confines of the judicial system, as opposed to developing precinct captains in the rough-and-tumble of electoral politics.

Decades later, Hamilton has proved to be prescient, if not precise. For we're all plaintiffs now. But we're posturing in the court of public opinion, where we've grown accustomed to asserting "rights" and non-negotiable demands. Playing in this highly professionalized arena requires large sums of money and well-paid staff. Efforts to regulate the process—whether formally through campaign finance reform, or informally by means of political correctness—have not been helpful. Indeed, they have contributed to the rise of Trumpism. But whereas in the past, bluster, posturing, and confrontation often led to concrete political gains, today they just lead to . . . more bluster, posturing, and confrontation.

Unfortunately, Mexican-American leaders have assimilated to this system and come to rely too much on plaintiffs and not enough on precinct captains. Mexican Americans have been encouraged to develop a brittle pride that often hinders their ability to see the other guy's perspective and work toward an agreement. Mexican Americans are hardly the only ones to be seduced into this kind of identity politics. But as the largest group of new guys on the American block, it has left them in a particularly vulnerable position. By calling attention to this, Donald Trump may have inadvertently done them—and the rest of us—a favor. ♦

# Entitled to Spend

Will Congress restrain a profligate president?

BY JAY COST



As a candidate for president, Donald Trump did not offer much in the way of specific policies. Still, based on the handful of details he did present, it is pretty clear he wants to spend money, *a lot of money*.

For starters, he wants to cut taxes—"big league." The Tax Foundation estimates that the Trump plan would reduce federal revenues by \$4.4 to \$5.9 trillion over the course of a decade. Under dynamic scoring, whereby the growth of the economy is factored into the analysis, that number drops to somewhere between \$2.6 and \$3.9 trillion.

Trump also wants to spend more on infrastructure. Last week, McClatchy published a list of about 50 projects that the Trump administration envisions as public-private partnerships. The total price tag is estimated at \$137.5 billion—a lot of dough for Uncle Sam, even if the private sector picks up some of the tab. Trump

also promised to increase funding for the Veterans Administration and suggested that veterans should be treated by any doctor that accepts Medicare—an idea that sounds great, but would be expensive. Trump intends to end the military sequester, which has a 10-year price tag of about \$1 trillion. In a September speech, he promised to "ask Congress to fully offset the costs of increased military spending."

But where will such savings be found? The good news is that Trump has nominated Mick Mulvaney, a South Carolina congressman and noted budget hawk, as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Perhaps he will be a rigorous steward of the public finances. The bad news is that the administration already seems to have taken entitlement reform off the table. A few days before the inauguration, White House chief of staff Reince Priebus told ABC News, "There are no plans in President-elect Trump's policies moving forward to touch Medicare and Social Security." This is despite the fact that

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BRITT SPENCER



these programs are the main drivers of our long-term debt. According to the Congressional Budget Office's 2016 long-term outlook, by 2046 the shortfall from these two entitlements alone will total nearly 6 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. That is an astounding sum—yet Trump has no desire to rein in these costs.

Sure, the president has talked about eliminating “waste, fraud, and abuse” from our entitlement system, as well as generating such outstanding economic growth that our fiscal hole will fill itself. This elides the fundamental problem, however, especially with Medicare: People receive *a lot more* in benefits than they ever pay in. According to Chris Conover of the American Enterprise Institute, by 2030 a high-earning couple will receive nearly \$360,000 in lifetime Medicare benefits, for just over \$180,000 in lifetime payments. This is not a social insurance program; it is a social *welfare* program.

If Trump is not going to cut entitlements, he is not going to find the

**People receive a lot more in Medicare benefits than they ever pay in. By 2030 a high-earning couple will receive nearly \$360,000 in lifetime Medicare benefits, for just over \$180,000 in lifetime payments. This is not a social insurance program; it is a social welfare program.**

money he needs. Slashing the National Endowment for the Humanities might drive some nice headlines on conservative blogs, but it is basically a rounding error in the federal budget. The main drivers are military spending, which Trump wants to increase, and entitlements, which Trump wants to leave unchanged. He could, alternatively, call for tax hikes to pay for increased spending, but instead he wants massive tax cuts.

The result of his proposals will therefore be a substantial increase in the federal debt.

This is deeply anti-republican. The preamble to the Constitution calls for government that secures “the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,” meaning that the welfare of future generations is one purpose of today's government, even if those generations do not yet participate in civil society. Our deficits, in effect, enable voters today to benefit from federal largesse at the expense of our posterity.

Our Founding Fathers would be appalled by this. While Alexander Hamilton thought that our national debt could be a “national blessing,” he never imagined it as a tool to burden our children to make life easier for ourselves. Thomas Jefferson was an extreme deficit hawk. He once argued to James Madison that because “the dead have neither powers nor rights” over the earth, “no generation can contract debts greater than may be paid during the course of it's [sic] own

## An Important Trade Agreement You Haven't Heard Of

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Good news is coming for small and medium-size businesses that want to reach billions of customers around the world. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is set to ratify a groundbreaking, but little talked about, new agreement known as the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). This agreement will cut red tape and simplify the movement of goods across borders for the 164 countries that are WTO members.

The TFA will be a victory for American businesses of all sizes, particularly for small and medium-size businesses that are the backbone of our economy. These job creators employ more than 50% of private sector employees and represent one-third of U.S. merchandise export revenue. Yet their trade potential—and, in turn, their growth potential—

has been limited for too long by a complex maze of bureaucratic and international border procedures.

Jason Wilson, owner of the small business Back Forty Beer Company in Gadsden, Alabama, has encountered such obstacles. He started exporting his beer to Asia but was taken aback by the hurdles he had to clear just to do business in many countries.

“It may sound easy,” he told us. “You have a solid product and a great new market to sell it in, but the challenges are immense. Every country has different paperwork, regulations, and procedures that are often redundant. Learning how to move your product through the global supply chain and get it on store shelves is a tremendous challenge.”

The TFA will be a welcome relief for Mr. Wilson and millions of business owners like him. It will help them lower costs, boost sales, and grow their businesses by breaking

down unnecessary barriers and simplifying trade requirements. The TFA can be a significant driver of growth in America as well as around the world. The WTO estimates that it could reduce trade costs by an average of 14.3%, bolster world trade by \$1 trillion, and help create more than 20 million jobs worldwide.

While the TFA will be a huge victory in the effort to remove trade barriers for U.S. companies, the hard work of implementation lies ahead. The agreement can only improve trade efficiency globally if each country commits to fully executing its measures. For as long as it takes, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will continue to push for successful TFA implementation so that American businesses can sell to more customers and drive stronger growth for our economy.



Learn more at  
[uschamber.com/abovethefold](http://uschamber.com/abovethefold).

existence.” Madison would eventually take a similarly staunch view on public debt, but he responded to Jefferson’s letter by noting there may have to be exceptions to this rule, as “debts may be incurred for purposes which interest the unborn, as well as the living,” like repelling a foreign invasion. Exceptions or no, neither Madison nor Jefferson (nor for that matter Hamilton) would abide the notion of a massive debt due to the *political inconvenience* of raising revenues sufficient to pay for expenditures, which is what we’re seeing today.

In addition to violating republican norms, the deficit is the key to the political success of big government. Our federal leviathan thrives by distributing benefits in excess of the burdens it imposes. That way, every voter can, in theory, receive more from the state than he pays in taxes. Of course, there is no such thing as a free lunch, but with deficit spending the burdens are systematically shifted to future generations—who, conveniently, cannot vote. If every current voter can receive more than he pays in, then each has an incentive to vote for ever-larger government. On the other hand, if the government were to disclaim deficit spending, every benefit increase for one person would require a sacrifice by another, who would then become a countervailing force to an ever-expanding state.

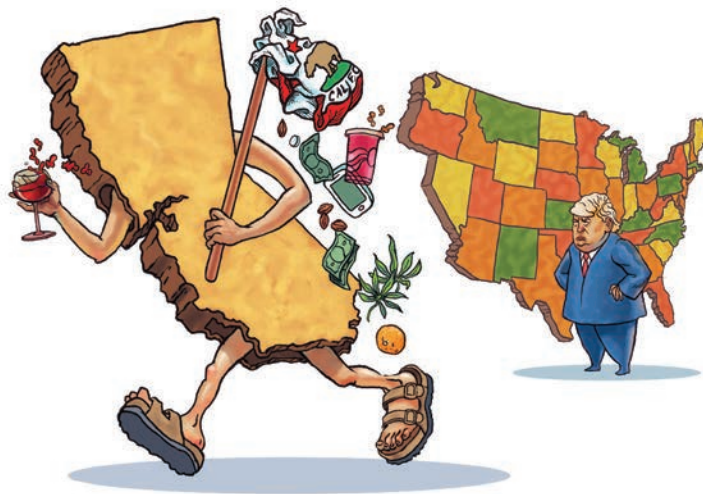
If the GOP really wishes to stop the growth of government, it must rebrand itself an anti-deficit party. Back in 2009-2010, Barack Obama and congressional Democrats spent like drunken sailors, just as the GOP warned during the 2008 campaign. But people did not trust the party—in no small part because when it had total control over the government, it too spent irresponsibly. If the public were actually to believe that Republicans are committed to fiscal discipline, they’ll take future GOP warnings about Democratic profligacy more seriously.

Controlling deficit spending should thus be a priority for this government. Congressional Republicans will have to hold the line should the new president turn out to be as spendthrift as he has indicated he will be. ♦

# This Land Is Their Land

California throws a hissy fit.

BY DAVID DeVoss



To hear governor Jerry Brown tell it, California is all that stands between Washington and the ruin of the nation. In his recent “State of the State” address, Brown promised to defy Donald Trump, fashioning it as a great patriotic quest: “When we defend California,” Brown said, “we defend America.”

California’s combative stance toward Washington began as farce the night after Donald Trump’s election when several hundred people paraded around the state capitol in Sacramento waving banners promoting what’s called Calexit, the agenda of the secessionist Yes California Independence Campaign. By the time the state legislature convened a month later, the laughter had been replaced with angry invective directed at the Trump team’s intention to deport undocumented immigrants, build a border wall, relax environmental regulations, and gut Obamacare.

David DeVoss is editor of the *East-West News Service* in Los Angeles.

Trump’s policies are “cynical, short-sighted, and reactionary,” proclaimed assembly speaker Anthony Rendon immediately after gaveling the session to order. “White nationalists and anti-Semites have no business working in the White House.” He dismissed any notion of reconciliation or compromise: “Californians do not need healing. We need to fight.”

Jerry Brown had already adopted that attitude. In December, he told an American Geophysical Union gathering in San Francisco that California will slash greenhouse emissions even if Washington eases climate regulations. Brown said his state will defy the Trump administration even if that means losing federal energy grants: “We’ve got a lot of firepower. We’ve got the scientists. We’ve got the universities. We have the national labs, and we have the political clout and sophistication for the battle.” And what if the president repurposes the NASA satellites currently used to gather climate data? “California,” Brown said,

JEFF DURHAM / TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY LLC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

“will launch its own damn satellite.”

Sacramento’s message to the incoming president: Don’t Mess with California. The sixth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$2.5 trillion, the state has no little weight to throw around. California is poised to leverage its heft against Donald Trump the way Texas did against Barack Obama—by filing a barrage of lawsuits.

Some of those lawsuits will challenge Trump’s environmental policies. “If the new administration decides to relax the ozone standards, which some states want them to do, that certainly would be litigated,” says David Pettit, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Southern California office.

But the biggest clashes are likely to be over immigration. According to the Pew Research Center, there are just over 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, about a quarter of them in California. About a third of the 742,000 “Dreamers” protected from deportation by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program call California home. Thousands of undocumented students attend California’s public universities and community colleges, where they can receive financial aid and pay in-state tuition.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has declared its campuses “safe zones” for children traumatized by Trump’s election and says it will not answer inquiries about students’ immigration status. Cal State says university police on its 23 campuses will ignore federal requests for deportation holds. Meanwhile, University of California president Janet Napolitano, who was Obama’s secretary of homeland security from 2009 to 2013, said neither she nor her campus police will assist federal immigration agents or participate in any investigations of immigration violations. Said Napolitano: “UC will act upon its deeply held conviction that all members of our community have the right to work, study, and live safely and without fear at all UC locations.”

San Francisco is raising \$5 million to defend immigrants in deportation proceedings. Los Angeles is putting

together a \$10 million legal defense fund and is hiring an “immigrant advocate” to work with schools and community colleges to prevent deportations.

In Sacramento, where Democrats hold two-thirds of the seats in both houses of the state legislature, one of the first bills introduced at the new session provides government grants to nonprofit organizations defending immigrants facing deportation. A second funds training programs for public defenders who specialize in immigration cases. The first is projected to cost between \$10 million and \$80 million to implement—money well spent according to Sen. Ricardo Lara, whose parents came to California illegally: “We are going to fight

**There are just over 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States, about a quarter of them in California. About a third of the 742,000 ‘Dreamers’ protected from deportation by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program call California home.**

you in this legislature, we are going to fight you in our courts, and yes, we are going to fight you in the streets.”

On occasion, Trump has said that the only illegal immigrants he intends to deport are violent felons, a position White House spokesman Sean Spicer reiterated the first week of the new administration. But immigration activists are opposed to deporting even—perhaps especially—violent criminals. “Felons we deport to Central America resume their criminal activity, prompting new waves of refugees to flee north for safety,” says Mexican American Legal Defense Fund president Thomas Saenz. “Why not keep these people in prison here and try to rehabilitate?”

The job of fighting with Republican-controlled Washington will fall in large part to newly appointed state attorney general Xavier Becerra. The

former 12-term congressman will have some high-profile help in the person of former U.S. attorney general Eric Holder. California has hired Holder on a monthly \$25,000 retainer to keep the federal cash flowing to sanctuary cities and other state entities if things turn nasty. And that they may.

San Francisco could lose more than \$1.2 billion in federal money if Washington punishes sanctuary cities that shield illegal immigrants. To keep its funding flowing, San Francisco has already sued the Trump administration in federal district court, arguing that any defunding would violate constitutionally protected states’ rights. The California senate is considering legislation to make the entire state a sanctuary—prohibiting all law enforcement from cooperating with federal immigration officials.

Given their state’s demographic shift, California politicians have no incentive to work with Washington. Those who fail to muster sufficient outrage invite accusations of racism and bigotry. Even as reliable a liberal as Dianne Feinstein has come in for abuse: Some 200 protesters gathered outside her San Francisco home late in January to denounce the senator for voting to approve four of Donald Trump’s cabinet nominees.

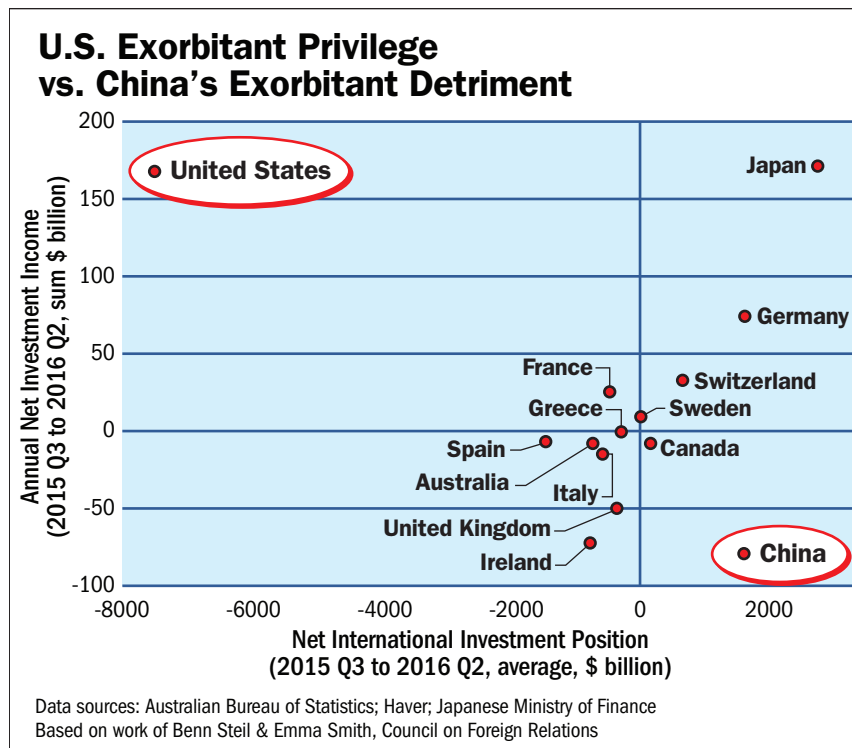
Los Angeles remains a city where a Trump bumper sticker is an invitation to have your car keyed. When California state GOP treasurer Mario Guerra was quoted in a *Los Angeles Times* story about Latinos supporting Trump, “I was called a traitor to my race and worse,” he says.

The demise of the two-party system—the state GOP hovers between endangered and extinct—has diminished civic discourse. “California’s political climate is insane,” says Joel Kotkin, executive editor of *newgeography.com* and a professor of urban studies at Chapman University in Orange County. “Say anything nice about Trump and people look at you as if you have the mark of Cain. The inauguration’s past and still there are demonstrations every day. The only thing this behavior can accomplish is to make Trump look like a victim.” ♦



# Of Debt and Detriment

China's currency games have been helping, not harming, the dollar. **BY BENN STEIL & EMMA SMITH**



It is the exorbitant privilege of the United States that it can conjure the world's primary reserve currency, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, then French finance minister and later president, remarked half a century ago. This privilege, maintained as the dollar took the place of gold, allows the United States to be deeply indebted to the rest of the world while earning far more income abroad than it pays out in interest. Less well known is the mirror image of the

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exorbitant privilege, what we call the exorbitant detriment. It is, not surprisingly, borne by the world's largest holder of U.S. debt: China.

Having run persistent current account deficits since the early 1990s, the United States has accumulated a net debt to the world of \$7.8 trillion. China, by contrast, is the world's largest net creditor, to the tune of \$1.7 trillion. We would expect countries that are net debtors to pay out more income than they receive, and those that are net creditors to earn more income than they receive—and, indeed, this holds for most of the world. But for the United States and China, the opposite is true. Despite its vast debt, the United States earned

\$180 billion *more* in foreign investment income over the year to September 2016 than foreigners earned on U.S. investments. China, on the other side, paid out \$50 billion more to foreigners than it received.

The unique financial position of the United States can be explained by the willingness of foreigners to accept a trivial return to hold dollar-denominated assets. China's exorbitant detriment is, to some extent, the price it bears for being on the other side of this transaction. Foreign exchange reserves account for half of China's foreign assets, of which around 40 percent are invested in low-yielding U.S. Treasury securities, making China the world's largest holder of dollar-denominated central bank reserves.

But China's negative net foreign investment income also reflects the fact that it is lending to the rest of the world at risibly low rates. Chinese government institutions lend far more cheaply than alternative lenders to domestic, as well as foreign, firms operating abroad. This reflects the government's efforts both to subsidize its companies and to strengthen economic ties with resource-rich countries in, for example, Africa and Latin America.

Can China continue supporting its exorbitant detriment indefinitely? Not if it wants to prioritize a halt to reserve sales, which have been necessitated by capital fleeing China on expectations of continued renminbi depreciation amid weakening economic growth. Rather than letting the renminbi fall in response to outflows, Chinese officials have been selling reserves to stem the pace of depreciation. Unlike those of previous periods, this intervention favors the United States by making the dollar more competitive. Nonetheless, President Donald Trump has threatened to declare China a currency manipulator. If China were to respond by letting the renminbi float freely, he would be in for a rude surprise: The currency would likely plummet, not rise.

As a result of China's intervention, its foreign currency reserves are down almost \$1 trillion from their mid-2014 peak, with \$156 billion sold just in the

past three months. At \$3 trillion, China's reserve stockpile is still by far the largest in the world. But according to the International Monetary Fund's framework for reserve adequacy, China needs to hold between \$1.8 and \$2.7 trillion to safeguard against a balance of payments crisis. Should outflows continue at the pace seen over the last three months, China's reserves will fall to dangerously low levels by summer.

China could hold on to more of its reserves by demanding higher returns on its lending abroad. How much officials need to sell to hold the renminbi steady is determined by the gap between China's current account surplus—that is, the income it receives from abroad—and the amount of capital leaving the country. China runs a large current account surplus thanks

to income from its exports. But negative net investment income reduces the surplus. If China's investment income had been just zero over the year to September 2016, the country could, all else being equal, have kept \$50 billion more of its reserves (selling \$270 billion rather than \$320 billion).

Raising the interest rates China charges on overseas lending is, however, not without costs. China would have to stop subsidizing its companies in order to win foreign contracts, as well as its efforts aimed at putting dollars to the service of geostrategic objectives. In short, it would mean China behaving more like a mature developed country. For China and the world, this is the better path for it to take. It would eliminate a source of both financial instability and political friction. ♦

# Housing's Drag on the Economy

Trying to boost building makes sense again.

BY **IKE BRANNON**

Nearly every household in the country spends a sizable proportion of its income on housing. The median household allots over one-third of its income to keeping a roof over its head, and the annual expenditure of the median earner's income on housing has increased by 35 percent since 2000.

People for the most part aren't spending more on housing because they are buying bigger or nicer houses, although some of that obviously has taken place. But most of this growth has been driven by an increase in cost. Housing prices have grown steadily in recent decades and are nearly twice as

high today as they were 25 years ago, on average—a pace that far exceeds gains in income for the average household. After a sizable retrenchment in 2008-2010, prices have nearly returned to pre-recession highs, although some regions of the country are languishing.

When demand for a good increases, it normally triggers an increase in the supply, but this has not been happening all that much: New housing starts fell almost 80 percent from the pre-recession peak to the 2009 trough, and today are at only 60 percent of those heady pre-recession numbers. So things have bounced back over the last seven years, but home-building is still well below historical norms.

The sustained, profound decline in housing starts cannot merely be explained as a hangover from the

housing bubble. Nine fallow years of homebuilding have left us with a housing shortage. We can glimpse this in part by looking at rates of ownership, which have fallen from 69 percent to 63 percent in the last decade. Home ownership has fallen even more among young adults, declining from a peak of nearly 50 percent in 2004 to under 42 percent today.

The housing market's biggest constraint at the moment is tight credit standards. Most mortgages are purchased and bundled into securities that are essentially guaranteed by the federal government in one way or another. However, in order to prevent the sorts of excesses that created and exacerbated the Great Recession, the government retains the right to put the housing risk back onto the bank if it finds any problems with the mortgage. As a result of this, banks are understandably more cautious in making loans. More prudence is not an altogether bad thing, but there are families who have good credit and a decent income who are finding it difficult to purchase an affordable home.

The regulators are also putting more pressure on banks to rein in "unusual" housing loans. When I approached my hometown bank in central Illinois, where I have banked all my life and whose president I have known almost as long, about getting a nonconforming mortgage for a house in Washington, he told me he would rather not do it—not because it would be a risky bet for him (our down payment would be 50 percent) but because he and his lending team would find themselves burdened with paperwork to justify to their regulator a loan that would be anomalous in their portfolio, regardless of its surety.

What's more, federal regulations requiring new houses to be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly have greatly added to the cost of residential construction in the last eight years. A home builder from central Illinois told me recently that his construction costs for a new home have increased by one-third in the last eight years, making the purchase of an existing home much more affordable than

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building a new one. While energy-efficiency should be worth a premium to buyers, modern heating and air conditioning and the like save homeowners money, but only in the long run. Research indicates that most consumers completely discount savings like this that go beyond three years.

Developers in many communities also face substantial bureaucratic inertia. In the wealthy neighborhoods in Washington (and other large cities), every new development invariably faces substantial opposition from local neighborhood committees, city councilors, zoning boards, and a surfeit of activists worried more about, say, their free on-street parking than housing costs for their less-well-off brethren. These constraints on new housing help make middle-class housing even more unaffordable.

The dearth of new homes has had a significant impact on the economy. An analysis by Moody's Analytics suggested home construction boosted GDP by 1 percentage point at its peak in the mid 2000s, and in 2009-2012 its dearth reduced growth by 1.5 percentage points per annum.

The impact that sluggish home construction has had on the broader economy is substantial. A report by the NFIB estimated that the construction of a new home creates, on average, three new full-time jobs. By that metric the 2016 data showing we had one million fewer housing starts than before the Great Recession translates to three million fewer jobs.

A return to a healthy housing market would create an enormous boost in the employment of blue-collar men, a cohort that was hit particularly hard by the Great Recession and remains in a funk. There are currently seven million men between the ages of 25 and 54 without a job—fully 12 percent of this population, which a generation ago economists referred to as the “hard-core employed” for their invariant—and low—unemployment rates.

There are myriad reasons for this seismic change, of course—that most women remain in the labor force after having children means that there is

less urgency for married men to work, and fewer of these men support a family these days for that matter.

But a major source of blue-collar jobs has always been home construction, and a large number of those jobs have vanished with the decline in housing. President Trump's proposal to drastically increase infrastructure spending may help this group, but

**If the construction of new homes merely returned to the long-run average of the 1970s and 1980s that would mean a million more homes being built each year. If we returned to the per-capita rate of new home construction experienced in those years, it would amount to another two million homes constructed per year.**



*Home-building in San Marcos, California, January 2013*

building roads and bridges is not terribly labor intensive. While such investment would be welcomed by this group, the level of job creation from it would be dwarfed by the effect of a more vibrant housing market.

The potential economic gains from a rebound in housing could be significant, at least in the short run. If the construction of new homes merely returned to the long-run average of the 1970s and 1980s that would mean a million more homes being built each year. If we returned to the per-capita rate of new home construction experienced in those decades, it would

amount to another two million homes constructed per year.

Home-building at that pace would add another \$300-\$600 billion a year to GDP, which exceeds 3 percent of GDP. The mythical 4 percent growth rate goal that so many derided as unrealistic during the 2016 presidential campaign could actually be within reach, at least until real labor shortages would start to constrain the economy. Given the number of discouraged workers in the economy that could take some time to occur.

We make numerous mistakes in housing policy: Myriad regulatory restrictions depress the construction of new homes, and the mortgage interest deduction sacrifices tens of billions of dollars to encourage the wealthy to spend more on housing while doing little to nothing to help middle-class buyers afford homes.

While changing either of those factors may be difficult, there are other means to boost home construction. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have operated under the equivalent of a yellow flag since Treasury put them into conservatorship in 2007, and the Obama administration's issuance of its Third Amendment to the conservatorship in 2012, sweeping their entire net wealth into Treasury's coffers each quarter, amounted to a red flag. Removing Fannie and Freddie from their current limbo and recapitalizing them one way or another could boost financing for housing construction. This would doubly benefit blue-collar workers, not only creating jobs but also providing more affordable homes as well.

While constructing more housing is by no means a panacea for the cohort of blue-collar men who have been buffeted most severely by the economic dislocations of the last twenty years, it would represent a tangible step towards improving their lot.

We can—and have in the past—gone too far in singing the praises of home ownership, and overenthusiastic boosting of home construction led to a financial disaster. But the decade-long retrenchment has now led to significant problems for the economy as well. Maybe there's a happy medium. ♦



# The Revolt Against the Elites

*And the limits of populism*

By P.J. O'ROURKE

**T**he election of 2016 was terrible because it wasn't an election, it was a rebellion. America is having a civil war, or, to be more accurate, a War of Incivility. The war is not between Republicans and Democrats or between conservatives and progressives. The war is between the frightened and what they fear. It is being fought by the people who perceive themselves as controlling nothing. They are besieging the people they perceive as controlling everything. We are in the midst of a Perception Insurrection, or, depending on how you perceive it, a Loser Mutiny.

The revolt against the elites targets all manner of preeminence—political elites, business elites, media elites, institutional elites, and, kind reader, you. You're reading an article in a serious magazine, and the article is about a serious subject (however flippantly treated). This marks you as an elite.

## WE ARE NOT ALONE

**I**f it's any comfort, people all over the world are saying, "We're sick of the elites. We're tired of the experts. To hell with the deep thinkers who think they know what we should have better than we do and who—while they're at it—are grabbing everything we've got."

Great Britain's political, business, and trade union leaders were opposed to Brexit. That is, the people who supported the Iraq war plus the people who caused the 2008 global financial crisis plus the people who nationalized the British automobile industry were all in unprecedented agreement on one issue. Voters felt they couldn't go wrong betting against this trifecta.

A similar broad coalition of Colombia's good and great spent five years negotiating a peace treaty with a starving rabble of FARC guerrillas who had been marauding in the

country's hinterlands since 1964. A plebiscite was held to ratify the peace agreement, causing voters to tacitly ask, "After 52 years of murder, kidnapping, pillage, theft, and trafficking in narcotics, FARC is being offered retirement benefits?" The plebiscite failed.

There can be a reactionary element to the revolt. Such supposedly MSNBC-philic places as Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands have seen the rise of nationalist, protectionist, anti-immigration, EU-skeptical political parties. Parties of this kind govern Poland and Hungary.

In France, Marine Le Pen's National Front is now the largest single political party, protesting an influx of foreigners and never mind that the French *are* foreigners.

However, antielitism can come from every political direction. Brazil is in the process of bringing indictments for corruption against practically every one of its politicians—left, right, and middle-of-the-road—for the simple reason that they're guilty of it.

Sometimes the antielitism seems to come from never-never land. Among the principal contenders in the 2016 Icelandic parliamentary elections was the Pirate party (symbol: a black sail), featuring a platform plank to give Edward Snowden Icelandic citizenship.

Not to be outdone, citizens of the Philippines gave themselves a dose of electoral homeopathy. Overwhelmed by violent lawbreaking, they elected a violent lawbreaker president. Rodrigo Duterte, former mayor of crime-plagued Davao City, is nicknamed "Duterte Harry."

Even the dull politics of Australia have been in turmoil. Politics in Australia are so dull that the name of the conservative party is the Liberal party. But Australia has had five prime ministers in six years. Its last election nearly resulted in a hung parliament. A hung parliament! What a tempting idea. Although I suppose hanging legislators is immoral. And it's illegal, except maybe in Queensland if parliamentarians are caught chasing sheep.

In staid Canada they now have a prime minister who's a completely inexperienced dashing young celeb named Justin. I haven't Googled "Canadian politics." (Who would?) But I'm assuming it's Bieber.

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## THE POPULISM POP QUIZ

**A**mong poli sci savants, such contrariness at the ballot box is defined as “populism.” But it’s a definition that does nothing to define the phenomenon. Populism is just a name for an opinion common in most democracies: There exists a large herd of the clueless, and running circles around them is a small pack of wiseacres. Populist opinion has an effect even in political systems where the opinion of the populace doesn’t matter. Vladimir Putin harnessed populist outrage at the kleptomaniac incompetents who took possession of Russia after perestroika. Xi Jinping’s neo-Maoism makes use of populist anger at the all-the-tea-in-China scale of corruption among the Chinese elites.

There are even populist aspects to Islamic terrorism. Fanatical interpretation of “jihad” is antielite. Islamic terrorists hate elites so much that they have suicide squads of elites who go around killing *themselves*.

Countries with strong democratic traditions—and let’s hope we live in one—don’t harbor the kind of populism that goes psycho, like ISIS. Americans don’t appreciate being labeled as clueless, or as wiseacres either. Thus American populism has its limits. This does not keep American politicians from doing everything they can to provoke the alarums and excursions of populism. The most privileged politicians will give it a try. Hillary Clinton, wiseacre, toiled among clueless Latino, black, and millennial voters in hope of using the alarums of Donald Trump to promote her excursion to the White House.

The results of populism can be disastrous—a Hitler, a Mussolini, a Franco. In Europe, between the First and Second World Wars, the results of populism were more disastrous than anything since the Black Plague killed a third of the continent’s population. At least the Black Plague didn’t have popular support.

More often, however, the results of populism are a confused mess—for example, the mess that Andrew Jackson’s unwashed supporters left in the White House after his inaugural ball, and the confusion Jackson himself created by vetoing the charter of the Second Bank of the United States, causing the Panic-of-1837 bank run and a collapse in the frontier land speculations of his own supporters.

Blogger alarums and excursions to the contrary, America in 2016 had no Hitler, no Mussolini, no Franco. We

didn’t even have an Andrew Jackson. (Though Trump promised an immigrant Trail of Tears.) What we had was more like a Perón, and not even the Argentine dictator Juan, but a mixed-doubles, gender equity pair of Evitas.

*Don’t cry for me, mainstream media . . .*

As a method of replacing the sophistry of the wiseacres with the wisdom of the clueless, populism doesn’t work. Populism usually doesn’t work for the leaders of populist movements, either. The most notable populist in American

political history was William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925). His populist appeal was based on an easy fix for the problems of Americans who didn’t have much money: Print more.

Bryan ran for president three times on the Democratic ticket, and lost in 1896, 1900, and 1908. Woodrow Wilson appointed him secretary of state. Bryan announced a policy of strict pacifism. The United States went to war with Germany anyway. Bryan attempted to gain the Democratic presidential nomination for a fourth time in 1924, and lost. He ended his days making a monkey out of himself at the Scopes trial, defending Tennessee’s law against teaching evolution.

The most notable populist in history was Julius Caesar. He—N.B., those who’ve been saying the 2016 election “had a sharp edge”—was

stabbed to death by dozens of senators. The conspiracy was a confused mess. Some of the senators ended up stabbing each other. And the political aftermath was so much of a confused mess that it took Edward Gibbon 3,589 pages to describe it in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

## WHY ARE WE SO REVOLTING?

**T**he early 21st century seems like an odd time to be having a wave of populist rebellions, especially in countries where things are going fairly well—except for the wave of populist rebellions.

We’re not in desperate financial straits. The Great Recession of 2008 was painful, with a certain amount of waking up on friends’ couches after somebody took the house. But these days practically everyone in America has had a divorce. So we’d been through that before. And if there were any bread lines, they weren’t handing out loaves of Love-the-Taste low-carb ThinSlim. America’s obesity crisis abides.

We are embroiled in a long war. More than 7,000 American combatants have died during the 15 years of the

**People all over the world are saying, ‘We’re sick of the elites. We’re tired of the experts. To hell with the deep thinkers who think they know better than we do.’**



war on terror. But more than 7,800 American combatants died at the Battle of Gettysburg. Streets are not filled with protesters against the war we're in now. Hippies aren't sticking daisies in drones.

We're culturally and politically polarized, but not in a way that would startle an old-school history professor and jolt him awake from his nap in the faculty lounge. The year 1861—that was polarized. Fort Sumter isn't taking any incoming.

Yet people are fearful, and they blame their fears on the leadership elite.

Partly this is because the leadership elite haven't done a very good job. Take the Middle East, for example. Demons have been unleashed in the Middle East. Elites failed to address the problems that caused the demons to be unleashed. Indeed, the elites seem to have been *breeding* demons, in the kennels of elite diplomacy, elite geopolitics, and elite military strategy. Then the elites turned those demons loose in the Middle East as if demons had ever been an endangered species in the region, as if elites were trying to reintroduce them.

One result is murder all over the world. How much farther away from the quarrels and hatreds of the Middle East could a person get than to be at "Latin Night" in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida?

Another result is the European refugee crisis. What do the elites care? The refugees aren't crowding the halls and jostling the elites in the corridors of the European parliament in Brussels. The refugees aren't building shantytowns on the tennis courts at the elites' country clubs.

Young refugee men commit assaults in public places, like the Cologne train station, on public occasions, like New Year's Eve. That's the public's problem. These things don't happen at the *private* parties elites give.

The elites fail and don't suffer any consequences from their failures. As it is with elite carelessness about refugees, so it is with elite carelessness about immigration. To elites immigration means nannies, household staff, and fun new ethnic restaurants. Elites don't see any similarity between Trump's border wall and the gated communities where they live.

To be fair to elites, quick changes in social mores, economic norms, and political givens confuse everyone, especially those who thought they were leading the Mores, Norms, and Givens Parade.

We don't have to march in lockstep anymore. People are becoming persons, not masses. This is progress. But difficulties arise after the stride is broken. When the band breaks up, it can leave the tubas to be turned into beer bong; the fellow with the bass drum sitting on the curb playing the solo from "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"; the trombonist using his slide to goose the cornet player; and

nobody left who can spell "glockenspiel." Meanwhile, the elite drum major is just some dork standing in the middle of the street wearing a goofy hat and waving a stick.

Swift improvements in transport, communication, and technical capacities have combined with international trade to produce what is called "globalization"—a big word meaning the Earth has shrunk to a Pluto-sized planetoid.

We love to have everything from everywhere brought right to our door. Except when we don't. We love going to Yellowstone Park. But do we love having the herds of bison, geysers, trees, mountains, tourists, and bears in our rec room? We'll need to clean the carpet. Then we go to work in the morning and find out a bear ate our job.

The world is a smaller place. Did the elites think this would make everyone get along? Try it with your kids. Put them in a small place, such as the backseat of your car. Now take them to see the world. Take them to, for example, Yellowstone Park from, say, Boca Raton. How are your kids getting along? I guess elites don't take family car trips. I guess elites don't even fly economy class.

Then there's the Internet, which, I'm told, will *change everything*, and for all I know has done so already. Didn't there used to be a bookstore next to the . . . Hey, where'd the Sears go?

I'm glad I can comparison-shop for a refrigerator online and buy any brand that exists and have it delivered the next day with free shipping. But the Kenmore repairman at Sears has now enlisted as a foot soldier in America's opioid addiction attack. How do I get my refrigerator into the FedEx drop box when the icemaker quits working?

Let me say, with the magnificent grasp of the obvious that is professional journalism's hallmark, that all technological advances are disruptive.

The Industrial Revolution was famously disruptive. The poet William Blake made a plaintive query about the resulting air pollution and poor conditions in the workplace:

*And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?*

Of course, this ignores the dark satanic barns people escaped from to go work in the mills. The barns didn't smell very nice either. The Industrial Revolution was a net economic good. But people don't live largely in a world of net economic good. We live in our own little worlds, often practicing gross economies.

The Digital Revolution is also, no doubt, a net economic good. But a messy one. At least the Industrial Revolution was linear. Once you'd seen a railroad, how surprised could you be by an automobile? The rails and the roads went somewhere you'd heard of. The Internet,



definitionally, is all over the place. And whose bright idea was it to make sure every idiot in the world is in communication with every other idiot?

Therefore all of us idiots, we the people, who make up the populace, which leads to populism, are alarmed by our circumstances and are angry at our leadership elite for not being able to change them.

## ALAS, THIS IS NOT A TEACHABLE MOMENT

**T**he leadership elite don't know what to do. And Donald Trump, whether we—or he—like it or not, has just become a member. The conundrum of failure in every revolt against the elites is that when you succeed in overthrowing them you become them. You cease to be a solution and start to be a problem.

A person of libertarian inclinations can understand and sympathize with the revolt against the elites. But, so far, the revolt is not promoting an increase in individual dignity, individual freedom, and individual responsibility. It's doing the opposite—Trump vowing to build a wall between individual dignity and the United States.

To soothe populist discontents politicians have only one piece of equipment—politics. In an attempt to get enough popular support to achieve or retain their elite status, politicians keep making the machinery of politics larger.

It is over when the fat lady sings. Politics has become an obese operatic performer, warbling so loudly that none of us bit players can be heard, and so fat that we're shoved into the orchestra pit.

Political power has grown in expense. One-third of the world's GDP is now spent by the politicians in governments. One out of every three things you make is grabbed by governments. If your cat has three kittens, one of them is a government agent.

Political power has grown in scope. Politics cast their net over every little aspect of life. Nothing is so private that it isn't tangled up in politics. Transgender bathrooms! We all knew politics were crap. Now we discover that where we take one is a political issue.

When are voters in both political parties going to realize that politics is a two-way street? The politician creates a powerful, huge, heavy, and unstoppable Monster Truck of a government. Then supporters of that politician become shocked and weepy when another

politician, whom they detest, gets behind the wheel, turns the truck around, and runs them over.

Make the truck smaller! Yank the engine and install foot pedals. Make it into a Kiddie Kar so that the worst it can do is smack you in the shin.

Populism is a libertarian tragedy. Since the beginning of democracy in fifth-century-B.C. Athens, the greatest danger to democratic institutions has been the *demos*, the people themselves. Democracy doesn't just contain the seeds of its own destruction, it contains the roots, the fruits, and the whole damn tree.

Each person in a democracy is an individual. But when the persons become "the people" and "the people" become "populists," watch out.

What would have happened if that charming old duffer Socrates—lovably eccentric, full of silly questions—had gone around Athens personally asking each Athenian, "Should I be condemned to death?"

Individuals would never have killed Socrates. They had to become a mob first.

And what defines a mob? Mobsters. That Cosa Nostra with its code of *omertà* at the Clinton Foundation. Those "Make America Great Again" Crips and Bloods wearing their colors on their baseball caps with brims bumped to the right.

We should be learning the value of individual liberty from the failure of the elites and the fiasco of their vast political power. Good things are made by free individu-

als in free association with other individuals. Notice that that's how we make babies.

Individual freedom is about bringing things together.

Politics is about dividing things up.

Elites would have us make babies by putting the woman on this side of the room and the man on that side of the room while the elites stand in the middle taxing sperm and eggs.

But we aren't learning lessons in individual liberty, because we're too scared. We're daunted at the pace of material change, unnerved over social transfigurations, fretful about economic instability, and terrified by terrorism. Fear is a bad schoolmarm. We've got a monster at the blackboard. How can we learn even 1+1 when all we can think is, "EEEEK! Teacher is huge and slimy and has tentacles and two ugly heads!"

So we turn for help to the big, stupid bully at the back of the classroom. ♦

**Democracy doesn't just contain the seeds of its own destruction, it contains the roots, the fruits, and the whole damn tree.**





Edward Snowden speaks from Moscow to the Council of Europe (2015).

# The Enigma Machine

*Edward Snowden: spy or useful idiot savant?* BY GABRIEL SCHOENFELD

In June 2013, Edward Snowden, a 29-year-old National Security Agency contract employee, surfaced in Hong Kong with the sensational announcement that he was the source of top-secret American intelligence documents already being published in the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*. The information he was bringing to light, he claimed, reflected systematic violation of individual privacy by the omniscient surveillance machinery of the U.S. government: “Even if you’re not doing anything wrong, you’re being watched and recorded,” Snowden warned in a recorded video in which

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**How America Lost Its Secrets**  
*Edward Snowden, the Man and the Theft*  
 by Edward Jay Epstein  
 Knopf, 368 pp., \$27.95

he explained his decision to steal the documents and go public.

In many quarters, Snowden was hailed as a courageous whistleblower, a man willing to risk his entire future to bring wrongdoing to light. Inside the intelligence community, a different set of views prevailed: Snowden was regarded as a defector, possibly under the control or direction of a foreign power. Whatever his motives, one thing was clear to insiders as they began to assess what Snowden had taken and what he had exposed: A huge volume of precious secrets had been lost, intelli-

gence methods had been compromised, and valuable sources of intelligence had been shut down around the world.

Today, Snowden remains in Moscow, where he sought asylum after departing from Hong Kong and from where he occasionally chimes into America’s debates by way of tweets and streamed video appearances. The controversy over his role continues unabated, breaking along more or less predictable left/right lines. In Oliver Stone’s *Snowden* he is presented as a hero who discovers that “there’s something going on in the government that’s really wrong, and I can’t ignore it. I just want to get this data to the world.” In the intelligence community—and not only there—he continues to be regarded as a traitor, responsible for the greatest loss of intelligence secrets in our history.

REUTERS / NEWS.COM

What's striking about the affair, now almost four years on, is how many unanswered questions remain: What, exactly, were Snowden's motives? What did he steal? How did he do it? Did he act alone or with accomplices? With this book, we begin to get some answers—and when answers are not ascertainable, well-informed speculation clearly and responsibly labeled as such. Edward Jay Epstein is a veteran of this territory, having written a number of notable books illuminating the inner workings of secret agencies, including *Deception: The Invisible War Between the KGB and the CIA* (1989) and *Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald* (1978). In this searching inquiry, based upon careful study of documents and interviews with many of the key players, including in Hong Kong and Moscow, Epstein has produced not a whodunit but an important and compelling “howdunit.”

One of the most enduring mysteries is also one of the most important and basic: Why, exactly, did Snowden end up in Moscow? Snowden and his supporters have consistently maintained that Snowden was essentially trapped there by the U.S. government when it revoked his passport while he was in transit. Epstein successfully demolishes this confabulation. He produces a timeline of Snowden's comings and goings in Hong Kong, including his visits to the Russian consulate and an 11-day period in which Snowden simply vanished from public view after a warrant had been issued for him, his whereabouts unknown to the FBI and the Hong Kong police. Snowden evidently relied upon Julian Assange, proprietor of WikiLeaks, for guidance on how to escape from Hong Kong to a safe haven.

In a phone call Snowden placed to Assange—then as now, holed up in the Ecuadoran embassy in London—Snowden was advised to go to Russia, despite what Assange called the “negative PR consequences.” WikiLeaks then used its resources to help Snowden do exactly that. Russian “special services,” evidently operating under the instructions of no less a figure than Vladimir Putin himself,

enabled Snowden to board an Aeroflot flight to Moscow, despite his lack (at this juncture) of a valid passport. Does the Russian connection make Snowden more of a spy than a whistleblower? Part of the case for his being a spy rests not only on Snowden's choice of Moscow as a place of refuge, but on the nature of the material he lifted. Only a small portion of the material provided by Snowden and published by journalists was devoted to the domestic surveillance that Snowden was denouncing. A larger portion concerned the overseas locations of NSA bases, along with NSA sources and methods, including (among other things) what Epstein describes as “ingenious technology . . . for tapping into computers abroad that had been ‘air-gapped,’ or intentionally isolated from any network to protect highly sensitive information, such as missile telemetry, nuclear bomb development, and cyber-warfare capabilities.”

This is not the kind of material a whistleblower would ever disclose. It is

exactly the kind of material that a spy would steal.

Yet in the end, Epstein does not settle on a characterization of Snowden as a spy. In one of the most intriguing portions of this book, he examines the possibility that Snowden is something of a hybrid, someone who blurs the distinction between traditional spy and whistleblower. In this analysis, Snowden is an idealist who possibly “became entangled in the plots of others,” presumably Russian intelligence. It is not a criticism of Epstein to observe that *How America Lost Its Secrets* does not provide a definitive answer; indeed, it is a virtue that his book is careful not to step beyond what the evidence allows.

Even as he navigates in the confines of uncertainty, however, Epstein performs the important public service of toppling the myths that Edward Snowden and his acolytes have spun to justify conduct that, as this book persuasively documents, had devastating consequences for American security. ♦



# Glimpses of Will

*What we know of Shakespeare  
from his (known) portraits.* BY BLAKE SEITZ

When I say that *Portraits of Shakespeare* is the definitive history of visual depictions of William Shakespeare, it should not be taken as too high praise: There are only three images of the man that are likely contemporaneous with him. But Katherine Duncan-Jones, emerita fellow at Somerville College, Oxford, here provides the historical background for each of the three images in forensic levels of detail and offers a compelling original thesis about the authorship of one of the three images. She

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## Portraits of Shakespeare

by Katherine Duncan-Jones  
Bodleian Library, 128 pp., \$25

also gives her appraisal of the images' artistic merits and what they tell us about Shakespeare.

The images that historians are confident were created during (or near) Shakespeare's lifetime have been viewed by his admirers with great disappointment. Two are technically amateurish, and they do not give the viewer much insight into Shakespeare's personality or life. Only one, the so-called Chandos portrait, seems to do justice



to the greatest playwright of all time.

Let us begin on that happy note. The Chandos portrait, Duncan-Jones informs us, is a poor name for the best portrait we have of Shakespeare. It is named for a previous owner, the “prodigal and bankrupt duke of Chandos,” when it could more appropriately be named after the man, Francis Egerton, who donated it to London’s National Portrait Gallery. Better yet, it could be named after the young associate of Shakespeare, Joseph Taylor, who (Duncan-Jones believes) painted it. Up until this point, scholars have been convinced, based on the records of an 18th-century Shakespeare obsessive named George Vertue, that the Chandos artist was one John Taylor, “a Player contemporary with Shakespeare and his intimate Friend.” This attribution posed a problem for Shakespeare sleuths inasmuch as John was the most common Christian name in 17th-century England and Taylor one of the most common surnames.

Nonetheless, several possibilities have been forwarded, some more plausible than others. (On the less plausible end of the spectrum, it has been suggested that the great tragedian Richard Burbage, known to be an amateur painter, did it. But the attribution error in this hypothesis has never been adequately explained.) Duncan-Jones offers an alternative in the young star of a leading theater company, who by George Vertue’s account may have been tutored in the role of Hamlet by “the Author Master Shakespeare.” This would be Joseph Taylor, an actor who rivaled Burbage, according to popular accounts. Duncan-Jones speculates that Vertue mistakenly identified the painter as “John,” an explanation that seems more plausible when it is noted that 17th-century bookkeepers often abbreviated names to their first two letters. Vertue could very well have taken a reference to “Jo. Taylor” to mean “John” as opposed to the less-common “Joseph,” leading sleuths down the wrong trail for centuries.

So is Joseph Taylor, the great Hamlet and leading player of the Duke of York’s Men, the artist of the Chan-

dos portrait? It is an attractive thesis, in large part because it explains the portrait’s most fascinating attribute: its informality. Taylor painted Shakespeare “in a relaxed, off-stage mood, with his white shirt collar unfastened.” Even his posture seems to slump, as though the painting was executed during the rest breaks of a busy rehearsal. Shakespeare looks out cockily at the viewer, with the slightest shadow of a smile passing across



*The Chandos portrait*

pursed lips. His only ornament is a gold hoop earring in his left earlobe, a conspicuous feature that hints at Shakespeare’s “more splendid appearance in public” as a gentleman and frequent visitor at court.

The fact that Joseph Taylor worked mostly for a different theater company may explain why the portrait has reached us at all: He may have taken it back to his residence, or company theater, sparing it from the 1613 conflagration at the Globe Theatre that undoubtedly destroyed many Shakespeare treasures.

Then there are the Shakespeare images that are often viewed not quite as treasures but as artifacts with which we are stuck, like an heirloom dresser that clashes with everything else in the

house. I am thinking here of the bust that adorns Shakespeare’s monument at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, which is variously described here as “clumsy, provincial, and artistically second-rate ... coarse and garish”—and my favorite, “pudding.” The Stratford bust makes it appear that its subject, like his character Sir Andrew Aguecheek, was “a great eater of beef.” Shakespeare’s cheeks are plump, his body rotund, his head disappearing directly into his neck. Shakespeare’s mouth is agape, his wide eyes fixed far off into the distance. The sculptor may have been trying to depict the Bard in a moment of artistic revelation. He looks, instead, like he has been whacked with a mallet or perhaps fallen into a food coma.

As Duncan-Jones hastens to remind us, it is not essential “for a ‘great poet’ to look like one,” but that reality does not diminish the dissatisfaction most people feel about the Stratford bust, which is so pronounced that a Google image search for “William Shakespeare” does not return it at all. It has been memory-holed, and quite effectively. And perhaps that is for the best. “The whole history of the Stratford bust,” Duncan-Jones declares, “is one of overzealous interference and horribly ill judged and mismanaged attempts at restoration,” to the extent that the effigy we see today may not bear much resemblance to the original. At one point the limestone bust, which was originally colored with paints and dyes, was whitewashed in the mistaken belief that sculptures back then were uncolored.

While the Stratford bust fails as a work of art, the monument it adorns is revealing about aspects of Shakespeare’s life. While many wall-mounted monuments of the period depicted gentlemen with their families, Shakespeare sits alone at his work. This may have been intended as a fitting tribute to an artist of singular significance—or, perhaps, evidence of Shakespeare’s unhappiness in his domestic life, to be cited alongside the infamous “second-best bed” that he left his wife in his will. On a slightly less depressing note, Duncan-Jones

observes that Shakespeare's family motto—a late invention that smacked of arrivism—was omitted from the monument, possibly because it was singled out for mockery in a satirical play. Shakespeare was capable of blushing.

Finally, there is the Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare, a rush job commissioned for the overbudget and overdue First Folio. This image, unlike the Stratford bust, will be familiar to most fans. As a likeness, it bears some similarity to the Chandos portrait, but with wilder hair, a pronounced cupid's bow in the upper lip, and an improbably tall forehead. As a piece of art, it stands up to passing scrutiny—but not much beyond that: Shakespeare's head is so big and free-floating above the collar of his doublet that it appears to draw the body toward it by the strength of a gravitational field. And the text accompanying the engraving in the First Folio (by Shakespeare's friend and rival Ben Jonson) seems to acknowledge its deficiencies as a work of art within the bounds of politeness: *the Graver had a strife / with Nature*, Jonson wrote, *to out-doo the life*. The implication may be, Duncan-Jones points out, that the strife was won by Nature.

In addition to Duncan-Jones's discussion of each of the three contemporaneous images of Shakespeare, she discusses the many fakes, forgeries, and homages that have been created over the centuries. She also discusses the commercial applications of the three legitimate images, in case anyone cares to learn about the Chandos portrait in advertising.

Of course, the main attraction here is the three images: Shakespeare's admirers want to know what the man looked like. But why is that? And why does it matter to us, as it most evidently does, that he look like the self-confident rogue of the Chandos portrait rather than the "pudding" schlub of the Stratford bust? Perhaps because we want to think that the author of those magnificent plays and poetry looked the part, just as a lover wants to think his beloved lovely. Perhaps because, as the best portraitists have understood, a well-made image

can convey important qualities of character and temperament.

Hamlet certainly thought so, as he implored his mother to look first on the portrait of Old Denmark, with "an eye like Mars to threaten and command," and then on the portrait of his murderer-brother, who looked "like a mildewed ear." As a friend suggested to me, perhaps the reason we are so madened by the Stratford bust is because it indicates that Shakespeare, a man of unparalleled brilliance, let himself go at the end of his life, returning to Stratford "to get rich and fat" instead of working at his calling. Was the world

denied a masterpiece or two by this choice? Is it selfish of us to hold such a decision against him?

As with so many other aspects of William Shakespeare's life, those who search his portraits for insight are bound to be disappointed: They leave shadows of meaning but few revelations. Even the Chandos portrait, best of the three, is cryptic. Barring any new discovery, frustrated fans can only return to Shakespeare's real legacy, his writings. To quote Ben Jonson's introductory poem from the First Folio, *Reader looke / not on his Picture, but his Booke*. ♦

BCA

## Who's in Charge?

*The Constitution and the powers of the presidency.*

BY TARA HELFMAN

**T**he seal of the president of the United States features an eagle clutching the arrows of war in its left talon and the olive branch of peace in its right, a fitting symbol of the expansive powers of the American executive. But one might just as well have substituted a pen and a telephone to symbolize the powers claimed by the Obama presidency, which used these blunt instruments to eviscerate the lawmaking powers of Congress.

By declining to enforce federal immigration and drug laws on policy grounds, Barack Obama essentially invented an *ex post facto* legislative veto. And by claiming the power to bypass the Senate in international relations, he committed the United States to a dangerous deal with Iran. Is this really the presidency that the Framers created? And how should President Donald Trump interpret those powers?

*Imperial from the Beginning* offers

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**Imperial from the Beginning**  
*The Constitution of the Original Executive*  
by Saikrishna Bangalore Prakash  
Yale, 464 pp., \$45

a historical account of the powers of the presidency that will engage and edify scholars and laymen alike. It is essential reading in this first year of the Trump administration, a year in which the Republican party lays claim to both political branches of government and is poised to shape the future of the federal judiciary for decades to come. The stakes of the 2016 election were (as the president is wont to say) huge, and the GOP swept the deck. Unless the president provides disciplined and principled leadership, however, this victory at the polls may turn into a lost opportunity.

Breathtaking in its scope and coverage, this book underscores the historic potential of the new administration by offering an erudite and thoroughly readable account of the development of the American presidency. The author



*Saikrishna Prakash*

is the James Monroe Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Virginia. A former clerk to Justice Clarence Thomas, Saikrishna Prakash is among the legal scholars most frequently cited by the Supreme Court in its opinions. Moreover, he is an originalist, which accounts for his methodical approach to interpreting the text of the Constitution and his scrupulous attention to historical sources.

Of his interpretive enterprise, Prakash writes:

a wag might suppose that attempting to discern the original contours of Article II from the available founding materials is akin to predicting divine will by studying animal entrails, in the manner of the Etruscans and Romans. While “answers” of some sort will be found if one insists on finding them, many will view the process as unedifying.

But the author is no wag. Nor, for that matter, is he a butcher or a diviner. He is a lawyer, a scholar, and—in both these callings—a disciplined originalist. To him, the contours of the national executive constituted in 1789 present themselves not in omens and vagaries but in English, colonial, and early state institutions, in the discourse of the founding period—and above all, in the text of the Constitution itself.

However, the text of the Constitution presents challenges. We can scarcely read a dozen words into Article II before controversy arises. What does Article II mean when it proclaims, “The executive power shall

be vested in a President of the United States”? It all depends on what the Framers understood executive power to encompass. Here, Prakash argues that the 18th-century understanding of executive power encompassed the execution of laws, the management of foreign affairs, and control of the military. These were powers, he notes, “which required energy, vigilance, secrecy, and responsibility”—all of which the Constitution institutionalizes in the office of the president.

If this account of the presidency strikes the reader as decidedly kingly in nature, that is because it is. In 1774, James Wilson, one of the architects of the American presidency, explained the scope of legitimate royal authority in this way:

To the king is entrusted the direction and management of the great machine of government. He therefore is fittest to adjust the different wheels, and to regulate their motions in such a manner as to cooperate in the same general designs. He makes war: he concludes peace: he forms alliances: he . . . directs foreign commerce by his treaties with those nations, with whom it is carried on. He names the officers of government; so that he can check every jarring movement in the administration. He has a negative in the different legislatures throughout his dominions, so that he can prevent any repugnancy in their different laws.

One might just as easily substitute the word “king” with “president” and have a more or less accurate inventory

of the president’s Article II powers. But just because the powers of the presidency are kingly, it does not follow that they are absolute. As Wilson told the Constitutional Convention, “all know that a single magistrate is not a King.”

The Framers constituted a republic with a truly magisterial executive, but the executive is kept in check by the other branches. For example, the treaty powers, the powers of appointment, and war powers are shared with Congress, while the judiciary has the power to review the constitutionality of many executive acts. Nevertheless, the president’s powers are kingly in that they resemble, in many respects, the powers of the 17th-century English monarchy, including the power to serve as commander in chief, the veto power, and the clemency power. But the Framers abandoned other kingly powers, such as the power to serve as the head of an established church and the power to appoint members to the legislature, because they were incompatible with free government.

From his title to his very last page, Prakash effectively engages with Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.’s notion of the “imperial presidency,” not as an epithet but as a meaningful description of executive power. Greater attention could have been paid to certain constitutional controversies. For example, simply saying of sole executive agreements that “the president may use his executive power to make them” does little to explain how they differ in form and substance from Article II treaties, which require the “advice and consent” of two-thirds of the Senate. And focusing solely on whether the executive has the power to decline to enforce laws that he deems unconstitutional does little to explain whether the president also has the power to decline to enforce laws that he deems impolitic.

These are minor quibbles, however, with a work that is as magisterial as the office it describes. Professor Prakash is to be congratulated on explaining so important an area of American constitutional history in so accessible and engaging a fashion. Our new president would do well to put this volume at the top of his reading list. ♦

COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SCHOOL OF LAW



# The Simpler Life

*Austerity in theory and practice.*

BY LAWRENCE KLEPP



*Sparta, ancient and modern*

Philosophers once preached what they practiced. Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, Epicurus, and the Stoics not only devoted themselves to living simple, abstemious lives; it was the essence of their philosophy. Some of the most important modern philosophers—Spinoza, Kant, Thoreau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein—maintained the tradition of a spare, detached, often solitary way of life, but by now it has largely been lost, along with its importance. Most philosophers today are frazzled, multitasking academics, and they don't write about simplicity, they write about "Quantifier Variance and Ontological Deflationism" or "Modally Plenitudinous Endurantism."

These memorable phrases, reproduced by Emrys Westacott in the introduction to his book, *The Wisdom of Frugality*, are the titles of papers presented at a recent meeting of the

*Lawrence Klepp is a writer in New York.*

## The Wisdom of Frugality *Why Less Is More—More or Less*

by Emrys Westacott  
Princeton, 328 pp., \$27.95

American Philosophical Association. Westacott, a professional philosopher himself (he teaches at Alfred University), has committed the heresy of writing a lucid, accessible book with an immediate bearing on people's everyday lives. But it's not primarily an attempt to retrieve the ancient philosophical art of living (and writing) simply. It's an attempt to evaluate that tradition, and its contemporary echoes and amendments, at a time when life has arguably never been so complicated, distracted, and encumbered. Unlike the ancient Greek philosophers, contemporary Americans inhabit a time and place in which it is easier to be fat than thin and more common to have too much stuff than too little.

So a throng of books, magazines, websites, motivational speakers, and counselors has arisen, each pitching a simpler, less fitful and fretful life. There are Slow Food and Small House movements, off-the-grid guides, conquer-your-closet coaches, and vegan, organic, locavore, and other drastic stop-eating-that regimens. Simplicity has become a cacophony. Westacott steps in as a sort of referee: He articulates and examines every argument you can think of, and numerous others that never would have occurred to you, for a frugal, materially minimal life. And in careful counterpoint throughout this book, he sets forth just about every conceivable objection to seeking such a life.

The arguments over simplicity can get a bit complicated—he divides them into moral, religious, prudential, and aesthetic—but *The Wisdom of Frugality* isn't forbiddingly abstract. It ranges widely enough to cite films like *Babette's Feast* and to quote Woody Allen and Bob Dylan and *New Yorker* cartoons, as well as the usual suspects such as studies and experts. I relished some of the tangible odds and ends of ancient simplicity. The Spartans ate, as their staple meal, a black broth made of pork, blood, vinegar, and salt. A traveler who tasted it remarked, "Now I know why the Spartans don't fear death." Plato, of course, admired the Spartans. So did Rousseau, who praised their "happy ignorance" and wanted a society that emulated their artless indigence and severity. Among their deluded descendants are the Western intellectuals who applauded (at a safe distance) Mao's Cultural Revolution, which out-Spartaned the Spartans.

But Voltaire, who in his *Philosophical Dictionary* defended luxury and dismissed the resilient early Romans as "brigands," despised the Spartans as much as he despised Rousseau. He wasn't the only one who favored some measure of extravagance. Westacott mentions Aristotle, Hume, Mandeville, and Adam Smith. They called attention to the way that acquisitive ambitions spur trade and prosperity, and exquisite tastes multiply civilized pleasures and promote all the arts and crafts. Yet they are, among philosophers and

DE AGOSTINI / GETTY IMAGES

modern intellectuals, in a minority.

Still, most people have preferred to ignore the austere advice of austere philosophers. Westacott notes that in a 2007 survey, 64 percent of young Americans said that getting rich was their most important goal in life. If ordinary people, throughout history, lived lives of cheese-separating frugality, it's because they had no choice; give them a choice, as the Industrial Revolution and its consumerist aftermath finally did, and they find that they like going to the mall.

There are, as this book makes clear, plenty of illusions involved in craving riches, investing in lottery tickets, or trying to purchase contentment at the aforementioned mall. It has been found that, beyond a certain level, affluence and material possessions don't increase happiness, and that an endless proliferation of consumer choices tends to breed confusion and regret, not satisfaction. So the ancient sages were right? Not necessarily: Westacott suggests (with some help from Nietzsche) that the self-denying life espoused by them is somewhat illusory itself, being founded on a self-serving prejudice. In essence, the point is that a simple, pared-down lifestyle is made to order for philosophers. Anyone who wants to ponder cosmic puzzles or construct elaborate systems of thought needs a minimum of distractions—and material possessions, beyond a few basic ones, are distractions. Philosophers build their castles in the air. Most people want to build them on the ground, which costs money.

Intellectuals, ancient and modern, have tended to make the narcissistic mistake of thinking that everyone should, ideally, live like intellectuals. That's why their utopias are so hallucinatory. Westacott hasn't made that mistake. But the overall effect of his book, with its serried ranks of arguments marching in opposite directions, is to persuade you that hardly anyone ever gets argued into, or out of, a way of life.

The ancient Greek sages thought their prescriptions were rational, but they depended more on the example they set, and epigrams and

diatribes, than on syllogisms. And their followers turned themselves into sects: Epicureans, Cynics, Stoics. Many of our current simplicity proselytizers promise a sense of liberation, redemption, purity, and recovered primordial harmony with nature. Even our reflexive aesthetic taste for simplicity—tranquil, uncluttered spaces, thatched cottages, cow-studded rural landscapes, burbling mountain streams, Shaker furniture—carries a whiff of Arcadia or Eden.

Some kind of *sancta simplicitas* seems to cast its spell in every culture—or at least every culture complicated and sophisticated enough to be suscepti-

ble to surfeit and ennui. Much of it is tonic. Westacott rests his own moderate case for frugality on a wary, sensible environmentalism: He doesn't deal with some of the more influential modern forms of simplicity-seeking, like bohemianism, primitivism, anarchism, arts-and-crafts, Gauguin's departure for Tahiti, the desolate austerities of some modernist art and architecture, and the solemn intellectual pursuit of the mirage known as authenticity. He also leaves out the coercive simplifiers: lethal religious fundamentalists, neo-Spartan political fanatics. But he makes it clear that the simple life has never been a simple matter. ♦

BCA

## Mirrors to God

*The Anglican imagination of Austin Farrer.*

BY PARKER BAUER

**Y**ou might imagine, consulting some eminent minds, that the whole point of imagination is happiness. "Imagination cannot make fools wise," wrote Pascal, "but she can make them happy, to the envy of reason, who can only make her friends miserable." Samuel Johnson took the point but drew a different moral: "Were it not for imagination, sir, a man would be as happy in the arms of a chambermaid as of a duchess."

Then there's what might be termed the higher imagination, whose role, through revealing truth, is not so much to make us happy as to make us free. This species of imagination—along with its fickle sidekick, inspiration—is what is at work in genuine artistic creation. Where it comes from and how to get your fair share are the stuff of countless books and blogs, with answers ranging from reductionist left-brain/right-brain formulations to daffy quasi-mystical murk. Another view, peren-

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*Portrait of Austin Farrer  
by George Speak (1970)*

nial, is that imagination is a gift, divine at that: In the words of the Anglican theologian-philosopher Austin Farrer, "noble inspiration . . . belongs to what is most godlike in the natural man."

Here, at last, we crawl out of the happy-talk brainwave swamp. We need not share Farrer's religious premises (though I do) to feel that he has discovered a reclusive creature among the

KEBLE COLLEGE, OXFORD

roots and teased it out for all to study.

Austin Farrer (1904-1968) is regarded by many as the most brilliant Anglican thinker of the 20th century. A priest, he was warden of Keble College, Oxford, a redoubt of Anglo-Catholicism, and of his many books the most esteemed was *The Glass of Vision*, first presented at Oxford as the Bampton Lectures of 1948.

If Farrer ever enjoys a lusty revival, he'll owe his posthumous thanks to Robert MacSwain, an associate professor of theology at Sewanee, who has published two previous books on Farrer and who, in 2013, edited *Scripture, Metaphysics, and Poetry: Austin Farrer's The Glass of Vision with Critical Commentary* (Routledge, 234 pp., \$54.95), which gathered lectures, helpfully annotated, and six essays by various scholars. The lectures take in a lot of territory, but the theme is imagination—the reasonless vistas of prophets, post-Renaissance poets, and the rest of us.

Imagination, in Farrer's view, is not simply the formation of images but of images that function as metaphors, pointing to something else, both reflecting it and shedding new light on it. (Arguably, any image that comes to mind has metaphorical undertones, however minor, but Farrer is looking at a larger canvas, the essences of life.) The image tells us not what something is, directly; it reveals what something is like. A kiss might be described in terms of the chemistry of saliva, but if anyone asks, we compare it to a night-blooming jasmine.

Farrer discerns a category of "primary images" in the Bible that reveal (as far as we can understand them) the essential truths about God, man, and nature. Among these primary images are Son of Man; Father, Son, Holy Spirit; and Kingdom of Heaven. In light of these we are, then, to interpret lesser images—for example, Farrer's title *The Glass of Vision*. As MacSwain notes, this alludes not only to a pane, as usually understood by Paul's "Now we see through a glass, darkly," but originally to a mirror, what Paul's word meant when he wrote. Either way, it points to man's inability to perceive spiritual truth directly. Metaphor is the only means.



Keble College, Oxford

Life, for Farrer, is a "two-sided fact." The travail of imagination—lonely though it may seem under a lamp at midnight—is a kind of collaboration. In the act of imagining we are a "second cause." But the divine First Cause also engages in our act, whether we are aware of it or not. To the extent that we see as the First Cause himself sees, our "mind performs a supernatural act; and this cannot happen by [our] exertion, but by God's supernaturalising action."

We know the mind best, says Farrer, by its "luminous apex" where reason shines. We are only dimly aware of the mind's depths, but memories move us even when we're not remembering, and desires beckon even when thoughts are elsewhere. All this—yet we're able to imagine, to form metaphorical images, only by "inspired wit." Without it, "we can do nothing but work out sums and syllogisms." Inspiration comes not in reply to passive waiting but to a relaxation of the mind after a period of intellectual work: "a throwing of the reins on the horse's neck."

Wit—that is, inventiveness, not humor—is given by grace, a manifestation of divine love. In the prophet, it calls up "a process of images which live as it were by their own life and impose themselves with authority." The poet feels something similar:

Consciously, perhaps, he is only setting images in motion by rhythmical incantation, and then appreciating a certain way in which they "ought"

to develop and to express themselves. It is this "ought" which is the heart of the riddle. The poet does not know what sort of an "ought" it is, except that it is the "ought" with which his craft is concerned.

All great poetry must once have been religious, Farrer says. The Olympian gods, dead to theology, were now, in the mid-20th century, dying a poetical death. No longer were they invoked to represent the essences of love, war, and wisdom. Could poets find a continuity, or was "poetry, like football, just what it happens at any time to be"? Would they move to prose, nursery rhymes, even "true religion"? MacSwain suggests that this last was a reference to Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. Farrer may not have known Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," which reflected the turning-away from faith that poetry (and society) had already taken. Its closing lines, in essence a rewrite of the ending of Keats's "To Autumn," seem to offer a naturalistic substitute for the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove:

*And, in the isolation of the sky,  
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make  
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,  
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.*

Austin Farrer would have insisted, persuasively, that the First Cause had a hand with Stevens, the second cause, "in the trifling act of stringing together words, or the imaged ghosts of words," whether Stevens knew it or not. ♦



# On Your Honor

*Maybe dueling is the answer to modern politics.*

BY JOSHUA GELERNTER



*The duel of Eugene Onegin and Vladimir Lensky by Ilya Repin (1899)*

**O**n the day of Donald Trump's inauguration as president, a well-known neo-Nazi named Richard Spencer gave an interview to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. He was on a street corner in Washington, near an anti-Trump protest. During the interview, one of the protesters punched Spencer in the head, without warning, and ran away.

There's no better way to give a neo-Nazi the moral high ground than punching him when he isn't looking. No matter what you think of Spencer, no one has cause to sucker-punch him. Indeed, no one has cause to sucker-punch anyone. Punching a man whose back is turned is a cowardly and dishonorable act. Someone should point out to the "anti-fascism" protester who punched Spencer that sneak attacks and undeclared wars are taught in Nazism 101.

Previously Spencer had paid homage to Donald Trump with a Nazi salute; the televised punch turned him into a man with a legitimate grievance. You might, however, argue that the

man who punched Spencer has a legitimate grievance, too. Yet the American government has made it very difficult to resolve points of honor honorably. Because dueling is illegal.

Though variously tolerated until the end of the 19th century, dueling has been illegal in the United States from the beginning. When Aaron Burr shot Alexander Hamilton, he was charged with murder. But why should he have been? Hamilton consented to the duel and willingly took his life in his hands. Suicide may have been illegal at the time, but it isn't now. In modern America, not only does the law protect the right to kill one's self, it also—in accordance with *Roe v. Wade*—guarantees a right to privacy and a right to body-decisions. The many statutes and lawsuits that gradually undid the criminalization of homosexuality also guarantee the right of consenting adults to do what they like with one another.

So by what right, then, does the government keep dueling illegal?

One cogent argument against legal dueling is the inherent unfairness of fights between physically ill-matched opponents. This is the reason boxing is divided into weight classes. Fortuitous

in the discussion of punching a neo-Nazi, it is also the reason that when the elderly member of Parliament Daniel O'Connell insulted the future prime minister Benjamin Disraeli for (among other things) being a Jew, Disraeli called out not O'Connell but his much more able-bodied son. The Iron Duke himself, the Duke of Wellington, called Disraeli's challenge "damned gentleman-like."

We're fortunate that American ingenuity has already provided a solution to this problem, summed up in a rhyme I learned as a kid at my local gun range: *God made some men big and he made some men small / Sam Colt came along and he evened them all.* Pistols are a great leveler. Contrary to the impression given by Hollywood, shooting a gun accurately is not a particularly exotic skill, and there is no class of supermen who can hit any target at any distance. In the absence of quick-draw contests, pistol duels are simply a good way to prove how seriously you take something, by risking your life on even ground and footing.

Opponents of legal dueling—who will probably come from the religious right and the moralizing left—may fear a bloodbath. But they would be wrong, for three reasons.

First, American dueling culture (such as it was) is long dead. Legalizing duels would no more cause a mass resurgence of dueling than legalizing polygamy would cause an epidemic of harems. Those uninterested in dueling would simply refuse challenges, and public opinion wouldn't judge them very harshly. It's only the blowhards who would be embarrassed. Second, inasmuch as a form of dueling culture does still exist—reciprocal gang murder, for instance—organized, code-duello duels might make the process safer: less collateral damage, more chances for seconds to negotiate a settlement. Think of it like needle exchange. And third, dueling is no doubt cathartic in the extreme and would reduce the rate of stress-induced heart disease among survivors.

An ideal society would have neither neo-Nazis nor sucker-punching. Each in its own way is a threat to civilization. Duels might deter both—and Make America Polite Again. ♦

*Joshua Gelernter is a writer in Connecticut.*

# Liftoff Uplift

*Overcoming sexists and segregationists to put America in space.* BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**H**idden Figures is a nice movie with a great subject that makes you feel good about America, reminds you how far we've come since the segregated and male-dominated days of the 1950s, and even reminds us that once we dreamed big about exploring the stars and going to the moon and all that kind of stuff. Most of us have no idea that African-American women in the 1950s and '60s played important back-up roles in the development of the space program, and *Hidden Figures* is an unabashed tribute to them, their nobility, their good manners, their resolve, their determination, their hard work, their gumption, and their ability to retain their dignity under often humiliating circumstances.

It's just kind of blah, that's all.

You can't watch this movie without finding yourself lost in admiration for Katherine Goble Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, the mathematicians who are the "hidden figures" of the title. But there is almost no conflict here that isn't resolved during the scene in which the conflict arises. Even the mean, condescending sexists and segregationists here are relatively polite about their inhumanity.

And the people who aren't mean and segregationist are absolutely wonderful. Mary Jackson is "mentored" (as we say now) by a Jewish scientist with a flowery Eastern European accent who

**Hidden Figures**  
Directed by Theodore Melfi



Taraji P. Henson, center

insists she take courses to become an engineer because "we live in an age of miracles," as proved by the fact that his parents died in a concentration camp and he is standing under a module that will carry a man into space. (This character never existed in real life.)

When Katherine is assigned to help with the mathematics necessary to plot Mercury-capsule takeoffs and landings, she is told not to expect any kind words or emotional support from the gruff boss of the Space Task Group, Al Harrison (a fictional character played by Kevin Costner). But then, all Harrison does for the rest of the movie is follow her with his admiring eyes, say appreciative words, insist on desegregating their facility's bathrooms, and all but stage a ticker-tape parade every time she walks into his office.

Katherine is a widow with three

small daughters—but then, like clockwork, along comes a lieutenant colonel from out of nowhere at church one Sunday who initially expresses sexist views but then apologizes for them, cooks her dinner, proposes, and that's that: She's happily paired off like Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan.

For all I know, Katherine Jackson's long second marriage was as easy and as convenient as *Hidden Figures* makes it out to be, but everything here is so relatively frictionless that you never do much more than say "awwww" whenever anything good happens to these women. The main difficulty Katherine experiences is getting to and from a bathroom half-a-mile away from her desk, which is at first played for laughs and then used for the single dramatic flourish that director Theodore Melfi allows Taraji P. Henson, the otherwise highly combustible actress who goes off like a firecracker practically every week on the peerless soap melodrama *Empire*.

Melfi and his co-screenwriter Allison Schroeder, working from a book by Margot Lee Shetterly, clearly knew what they were doing when they decided to drain the drama out of *Hidden Figures* and ladle on the sentimentality and uplift. There's no question that America's moviegoers could use a little unifying uplift at the present moment. On the one hand, this is exactly the coda to the Obama years that Barack Obama himself would have wanted. And on the other, it hearkens back to the very time that Donald Trump tries to evoke when he says he wants to make America great again.

This is what Hollywood used to call a "message picture," except that it doesn't really have a message other than "Boy, they were great, weren't they? Let's give Katherine and Dorothy and Mary a hand." Which is a very nice thing, as I've said. But after awhile, you want someone to haul off and punch somebody else, just to get some life into the thing. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.



ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

# BANNON NAMED WHITE HOUSE CHEF

*Now holds record 17 posts*



Donald Trump and newly appointed White House Chef Steve Bannon Tuesday.

By CURT ZINN

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump continued to defy the political establishment this week, appointing longtime adviser and leader of the alt-right movement Steve Bannon to the position of White House Chef.

"Steve's tremendous, a tremendous cook, let me tell you," President Trump said in the Rose Garden this morning, immediately after Mr. Bannon was sworn in to the nation's highest culinary office. "And I know cooks," the president continued. "Literally. Like Emeril. Bam. That Emeril, the one who says 'Bam.' Tremendous catchphrase."

Mr. Bannon, who stood behind the president for his entire two-hour introductory speech wearing a crisp white chef's coat and hat, is easily the new president's most trusted adviser and now holds a record 17 positions within the Trump administration. He rose from White House confidant to a seat on the National Security Council in a matter of days, and in the weeks since, he

has been named to a succession of other posts, everything from Social Secretary to Postmaster General to the ambassadorship to Russia. He's even taken over as President Trump's golf coach, despite never having played a round of golf.

Some have doubted Mr. Bannon's qualifications for several of these positions, given his professional background producing unsuccessful films and running a Trump-friendly website. But perhaps the only person with more confidence in Mr. Bannon's abilities than the President is Mr. Bannon himself.

"I will discharge my duties as Chef with pleasure and joy, Mr. President," said Mr. Bannon, sporting his signature terrifying grin. "We will make White House food great again," he concluded, before staring silently into some horrifying, not-so-distant nightmare-future for several seconds. "And I can promise you this: no more kebabs, no more tacos, no more

*Continued on Page A3*